To All, Good Luck for the New Year

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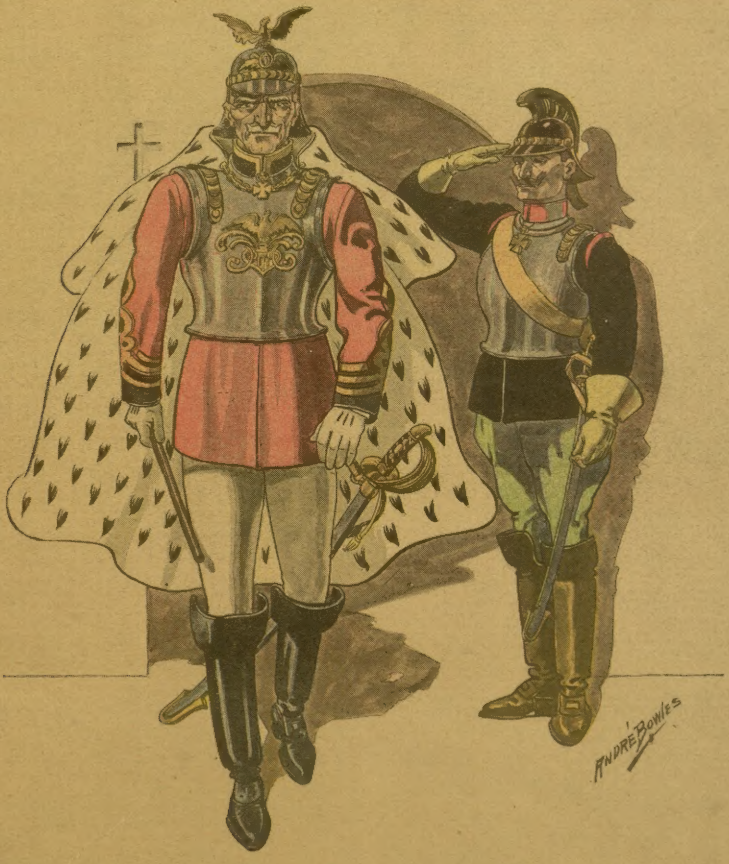

Their Lost Prince

Or, The Love That Swayed a Throne

By Marquis James

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CHAPTER I.

"HIS majesty, the King!" The helmeted and plumed minion uttered the words as one does a warning. He unstarched his spine and achieved a sweeping bow toward the door he guarded. The ministers of the crown, grouped about the long table in the privy council chamber, left off their earnest discussions among themselves on the word, getting to their feet at a precise "attention."

The monarch entered. The door minion resumed his perpendicular rigidity. A swish of garments marked the progress of every right arm—saving one—about the long table, as they were raised in salute. The exception was his excellency Ludwig von Vlissingen, the prime minister, who raised his left arm instead, his right having been shot away in battle. The King acknowledged this obeisance with a curt jerk of his hand, and on his command the ministers reseated themselves.

The venerable Leopold II. of Oligarchia was getting along in years. But despite his three score and ten he carried his body, racked with old wounds tho it was, erect and straight as a ramrod. The old warrior's hair was silver-white, as were his beetling, bristling eyebrows. In gripping contrast were the midnight black, darting, almost cavernous eyes that peered from behind them. They carried menace in their depths.

A glove-fitting uniform of the army outlined the King's military figure, the resplendent orders of a half-dozen courts blazed from his broad chest, and a sword, the incrusted gold handle aquiver with jewels, was cradled at his side.

The dictator of the sovereign kingdom of Oligarchia and his pawns were in session. The movements of these dignitaries were stiff and formal. The air was surcharged with tension. Pages and court underlings began to tiptoe in and out, bearing formidable, seal-splattered documents, which they spread upon the table. The ministers who had conversed with one another in nervous half-whispers and wagged their heads ominously before the King had entered were silent now. Every eye was riveted on the monarch. The strained atmosphere presaged the storm which was to break, and betokened the momentous consequences which hinged upon this meeting.

The King drummed his fingers on the arm of the great chair he occupied at the head of the table, waiting for one of his advisors—so called by grace of flattery—to break the silence. But all held their tongues. The ministers shot furtive glances, one to the other. The silence was tense; it was fearful. It could not endure much longer.

"Von Vlissingen!" Leopold rasped out, exasperated at the delay.

"Yes, your majesty," responded the prime minister, rising and bowing low.

"Have you the papers here?" snapped the monarch.

"We have, your majesty."

"And are they made out, ready for me to sign?" the King demanded.

"The seals are set; they are complete——"

"Then why this mysterious silence? Let me have them at once and get this business over with." The King had precipitated the vital issue.

"The documents are complete," the prime minister spoke slowly, taking up his sentence where he had left off, "except for one detail, your majesty——"

"And that is——" the King interrupted.

"The name of your successor, your majesty," Von Vlissingen completed the remark. "It was the unanimous decision of the royal cabinet that we make a final plea in an effort to dissuade you from your stand. In the light of new and startling disclosures we thought your majesty would hear us, and then possibly reconsider——"

"What!" thundered Leopold, in a voice that would command a regiment. "What! You persevere in your treacherous insubordination? You challenge my right to rule my kingdom? You dare to question my word or my judgment? Von Vlissingen, I warn you, another word of this insolence and you are under arrest."

"A thousand pardons, your majesty," the one-armed prime minister responded, bowing reverently, "you grievously misunderstand me and misinterpret my motives. I have spent my life in your service. As I have fought for my country I would die for my King. Send me to prison, condemn me to death, if you will. Only bear with me and hear me; it is our country that is at stake. Sensational disclosures have been made by our secret agents. Hear our report, and I am sure your wisdom will make it clear that your course——"

"My course is right," the King flashed back. "It is right as it always is. I am master here. I dictate the affairs of my kingdom and none shall say me nay. I am responsible to God alone. Rudolph, Crown Prince by right of birth, shall be my successor. I command that his name be written into the document of succession."

"But our subjects, your majesty," Von Vlissingen pursued with persistence that astounded even the King and dumfounded the other ministers. "Have a thought of them. Ten million people are to be reckoned with. The damnable poison of republican ideas from America over the seas is in their blood. They know Rudolph to be a soldier. His ways are stern; I appreciate that, for I am a soldier myself. They do not meet with the favor of the people. Time and time again they have broken forth in open demonstrations against Rudolph when it became known that it was your pleasure to put him on the throne. These have been quickly suppressed, of course, but nevertheless the liberalist propaganda has gone on.

"Your majesty, as a patriot who loves his King and his country, hear my voice raised in warning. The kingdom is a sleeping volcano. It is a smoldering powder magazine. The fuse is set, and needs but the spark to touch it off. The coronation of Rudolph as heir apparent would supply that spark. The detonation that would follow would rock the world. So why tempt fate, your majesty? Why not Prince Eitel, your second son? The constitution gives you the right to name your own successor. Eitel is more friendly to the people. In him they see——"

"Von Vlissingen, this is treason!" thundered the royal chess player in answer to the pawn who but once had dared to forget his station. "I can forgive much, but not this. You are under arrest. When you leave this room it will be to the dungeons. Rudolph will succeed me as King. The people be d—d! Let them rebel, as you say. Let them attempt it! There will be no quarter. Every rebel dies like a dog! I am an old man, but thank God I am no coward! The whinings of a few burghers, drunk on the wine of crazy American ideas, cannot cow me! I am King and intend that they shall know it! My word is law! If for no other reason than to show these anarchists that my word is law, I would name Rudolph to succeed me to the throne and defy them to do their worst."

"As King I am answerable to God alone, but to those of my ministers who have kept their peace in this meeting I will give my reasons for my insistence that Rudolph shall succeed me. For the very reasons that the prime minister advances against him, I advance in his favor. I pride myself that my eldest son is, first of all, a soldier. He is accustomed to being obeyed. He brooks no interference; tolerates no half-measures. He is a king to the manner born—every inch of him a king! If the house of Regalshofen is to stand, such must be the temper of the man who succeeds me to the throne.

"It is not Rudolph the people object to," the King went on, in more tolerant tones; "it is the house of Regalshofen. Imbued with their revolutionary ideas, they entertain the fantastic vagary that the return of the Orlandoffs to the throne would mean a realization of their dreams. The Orlandoffs have been weak. They were always weak. With them back on the throne, Oligarchia would witness the overthrow of her ancient kingdom and see a puny republic in its stead.

"My father realized this when he seized the royal power by force of arms, seventy years ago, and displaced the Orlandoffs. His methods were harsh; they had to be. The people have not forgotten how he executed traitors. For seventy years my father, and I after him, have held the surging emotions of an unsubmissive people in check. Eternal vigilance has been the price we paid. Had we ever weakened or wavered once, all would have been lost. The same is true today. For me to declare in favor of Eitel, who is more liked by the populace than Rudolph, would be a surrender to my subjects. And quick would the revolutionary leaders be to take advantage of it."

"But, your majesty," spoke up the irrepressible Von Vlissingen, as Leopold paused, "now that I am already under arrest I need hold no fear of consequences and can speak without so great restraint. You point to the menace of the Orlandoffs. Has your majesty any proof that any lineal descendant of the Orlandoffs, who might claim the throne yet lives? Old Grand Duke Nicholas, son of the last King of the Orlandoff line is dead. His young wife, Duchess Lucile, was killed some years later in London. Mystery attaches itself to her death, so the public believes—yet if they could but scan the secret records of our department of espionage——"

"Yes, yes, I understand you, Von Vlissingen," the King interrupted hastily to curb the running tongue of the prime minister. "The Duke and Duchess are dead. Yet, as you will recall, a child was born in Vienna. That was just twenty-one years ago. If that child lives, he is of legal age, and must be considered in the light of a potential contender for the throne—and a contender five million subjects of mine would champion."

"But no proof exists that this child lives," submitted the prime minister, encouraged and surprised at the sudden subsiding of the King's anger.

"And no proof exists that he is dead," countered Leopold; "there's the rub."

"No direct and conclusive proof, your majesty," defined Von Vlissingen, "but strong circumstantial evidence exists to that effect. He has not been seen or heard of for eighteen years."

"Circumstantial evidence has cost many a man his throne," the monarch responded. "I don't trust it. The child was born in Vienna, three months after the Grand Duke's death. Every attempt was made to keep the event secret. But our secret agents learned of the birth when the child was four weeks old. Grand Duchess Lucile remained in the Austrian capital nearly a year, protected by loyalists to the house of Orlandoff, and unaware that their every movement was reported to me by spies. But vigilant as my secret service corps was, it could not learn the sex of the child. Not even the most intimate advisers of the Duchess knew. This secrecy was not without purpose. It has been construed in various ways."

"To me, your majesty," broke in Von Vlissingen, "it is proof that the child was a girl, and fearing the hopes of the supporters of the Orlandoff cause would be crushed by this misfortune, the Duchess confided the sex of the girl to none. She hoped, perhaps, that, as the years passed, some way out of the dilemma might disclose itself."

"Again your surmise is ill taken," the King parried, put on his guard by the wits of the minister. "To me the cloak of secrecy thrown about this child makes it plain he is a boy, and that the infant was destined to be trained with the sole aim that some day he is to overthrow my dynasty. Mark how upon the discovery of the fact that our agents knew of the child's birth, mother and child were spirited away to Rome, and thence to Madrid, and thence to London. There, when the child was three years old, the Duchess—er—met her death. Then and there ends our record of the heir of the Orlandoffs."

"That is a positive statement, your majesty," reminded the prime minister. "Our secret intelligence office received a well-grounded report that the child, accompanied by Colonel Metz and Count Patsky—both noted leaders of the Orlandoff propaganda—was taken to Buenos Aires, Argentina. The house in which they lived was dynamited, I think, and all three were killed," he added darkly.

"You speak of rumors and nothing more," snapped Leopold. "I have been fed on rumors for years. Colonel Metz and Patsky and that child have been reported dead and alive, according to reports, a dozen times and in all quarters of the globe. I have spent the cost of equipping an army tracing down these reports, all of which have burst like bubbles. It has cost me many sleepless nights."

Leopold cut short his speech. For once he had forgotten himself—his tongue had slipped and an inkling of the truth was out. The King had revealed but a glimpse of the mental perturbation and anguish which had been his thruout the long, tempestuous years of his reign. This lonely old man, hated by his subjects and reviled as an oppressor and enemy of liberty the world over, had spent his life haunted by this great, everlasting, secret dread that after all the throne his father had seized by might rather than right, perhaps, was to be wrenched from him. How the thought gnawed at his heart the world little had guessed.

The King, embarrassed and chagrined at his accidental admission, again flew into a transport of rage.

"I admit I have spent sleepless nights weighed down by the cares of a kingdom," he shouted. "But I will do so no more. Rudolph shall be crowned as heir apparent and assume a share of the burdens of state at once. This is my determination, fixed and unalterable. I forbid further discussion. Von Vlissingen, hand the papers to the royal secretary, who will insert Rudolph's name."

The King's tone was a peril in itself. His ministers were aghast. Even the intrepid Von Vlissingen dared not brook his sovereign's anger. He surrendered the papers to Mulhausen, the royal secretary, who quickly penned in the name of Prince Rudolph.

Leopold grasped the document from the secretary's hand. He stabbed a pen into an inkwell, and with a flourish executed the huge "L" which made his signature unique among those of the monarchs of the world. But he wrote no more.

"Hold! Your majesty!"

A royal courier, brushing by the startled guard dashed into the council chamber and shouted the exclamation in terrified accents.

The King's hand was stilled. Von Vlissingen, never of record confused in an emergency, was on his feet in an instant.

"Your majesty, the Crown Prince has been——"

The prime minister's one hand clapped over the mouth of the courier, cut short his words. Von Vlissingen led the man into a private room.

The council chamber was in an uproar. Suddenly the sound of angry voices penetrated from without the palace. Consternation reigned even among these staid statesmen. One question was on every lip:

"What has happened?"

They were not long kept in suspense. The prime minister re-entered the room. His face was blanched white. He advanced with halting, uncertain steps toward the table. He grasped a chair—barely in time to save himself from collapse. All eyes were upon him.

"Your majesty," he gasped in a tone so low it scarce was audible, "your majesty, prepare yourself to receive shocking news."

The old King was a soldier and a man of iron.

"What news do you bring?" he demanded. There was not a tremor in his tone.

Louder and louder grew the demonstration outside of the mob that had marched upon the palace.

Von Vlissingen cleared his throat and raised his voice that he might be heard.

"Your majesty," the one-armed hero said, "Rudolph, the Crown Prince, has been murdered. The Orlandoffs are avenged!"

CHAPTER II.

THE enemies and traducers of the veteran Leopold were legion. He presented a ready target for grandiloquent statesmen and muck-raking theorists in their railings against autocracies and one-man governments. He was popularly known as the most hated man in the world, and he seemed to glory in that distinction. He had been accused of every crime in the lexicon of misdeeds, and he admitted most of them.

But accuse and assail him as they might, there was no foe so bitter who was not forced to admit that the venerable monarch was a man of almost unbelievable courage. His black eyes never flinched, not a muscle of his hardened face twitched as the prime minister delivered the news of this staggering blow. He merely bit his lip in silence. It was some seconds before he spoke.

"The heir of the Orlandoffs lives," he said, at length. "He lives, but he must die. The house of Regalshofen can and will retain the throne. Gentlemen, you may go now. Meet me again in an hour. By that time my new plans will be formulated and ready to be carried out. Von Vlissingen, I pardon your offense against my royal will. Gather the particulars of Rudolph's murder. When you return before me tell me the details of the crime."

The ministers and chancellors arose, bowed, and walked silently from the great council chamber.

In the corridors of the palace the din which came from without was deafening. It was the angry, inarticulate growl of a mob, now and then punctuated by a cry more distinct than the rest. Von Vlissingen, that bluff soldier, suddenly finding himself the power behind a throne, hurried toward the door that entered upon the great rotunda, or portico, of the royal residence.

But ere he gained this entrance a

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man, booted and spurred and wearing a much braided and bemedaled uniform, burst thru the door in mad haste. The flowing plumes of his cocked hat were disarranged and broken, and blood seeped from a scratch across his face. The blouse of his uniform was torn along the sleeve. It was Menderstock, Captain of the royal palace guards.

"My God, Captain, what has happened?" demanded the prime minister.

"Your excellency, hell has broken loose!" responded the soldier, bluntly. "What shall I do?"

Menderstock was a drawing-room soldier, a striking officer on dress parade, and little else. His showy chivalry and ballroom etiquette had won him favor among the ladies of the court. In this crisis our parlor soldier was quite beside himself.

"Do? Do?" demanded the exasperated Von Vlissingen, who well knew the mettle of the ladies' favorite Captain of the guards. "Collect your senses and tell me what is the matter. Don't run around like a scared cat. A fine soldier you are!"

"Your excellency," stammered the frightened guardsman, "the Crown Prince has been killed—foully murdered."

"I know that. Go on—what's the disturbance out here?"

"The palace is surrounded, your excellency. I thought maybe if his royal highness would consent to address them from the balcony he could quiet the mob. They are in an angry mood, your excellency. Every now and then some one shouts, 'Long life to the Orlandoffs!' The cry is greeted with cheers for the pretenders and jeers for his majesty. I tried to reason with them and they volleyed me with stones."

"Menderstock, your cowardice disgusts me," retorted the prime minister. "Talk of the King addressing those anarchists. The royal guard will address them—address them, sir, with sabers, and if that doesn't do, powder and lead. Come with me."

The dejected Menderstock followed the prime minister into the courtyard. The hissing, howling mob surged against the iron gates of the royal grounds, threatening every moment to crush the bronze bars by sheer force of weight and swarm upon the palace. The pavement had been torn up. Cobblestones, bricks, and all sorts of missiles flew over the high walls. They were aimed at the royal guard Menderstock had drawn up inside the inclosure. The situation was desperate. The prime minister signaled for an orderly.

"Summon Nitchoff and a guard of three men," commanded Von Vlissingen.

Nitchoff, second in command of the royal guard, had nothing in common with his chief. He was soldier to the marrow—a man of courage and resolution. He and three common soldiers drew up and saluted their chief and the prime minister.

"Guards, Captain Menderstock is under arrest by my orders. Remove him to the prisons," commanded Von Vlissingen. "Nitchoff, you are in command. Move your troops to the front of the gate. Give one order to the mob to disperse. If it does not comply in sixty seconds and clear the gate, charge the rascals with sabers drawn. Nitchoff, you understand me—charge the rascals with sabers drawn! I rely on you to distinguish yourself and retrieve the dishonor Captain Menderstock has cast upon every man of his majesty's royal guard."

"I understand, sir," replied Nitchoff, who saluted, turned on his heel, remounted his horse, and galloped off to repeat the command to the regiment.

With flushed face, head bowed in shame, and averted eyes, the dishonored Captain was marched away to a cell.

The splendid royal guard, mounted on fiery black steeds, swung around and drew up in battle array before the royal gate. The demonstrative fury of the mob increased. Nitchoff rode up a few paces and shouted his command for the rioters to disperse. His words were swallowed up in the jeers of the mob. Nitchoff glanced at his wrist watch. Two soldiers on foot had been ordered to advance on either side of the gate, and upon a signal to draw the bolts which let the iron barrier swing open. In precisely sixty seconds Nitchoff waved his command.

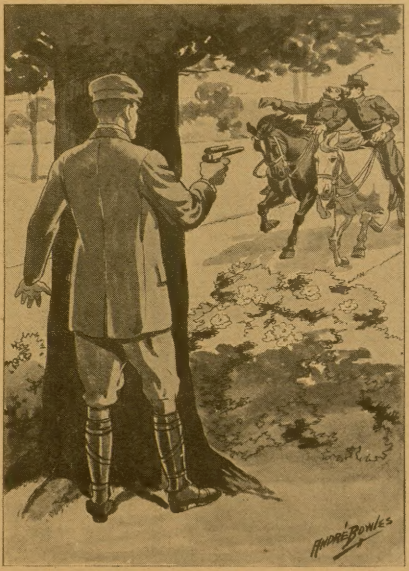
The gates swayed apart. With a wild yell the crowd leaped forward. A few had drawn firearms, but most were armed with stones picked from the street. Champions of liberty know no fear.

"To the charge!"

Nitchoff thundered the command.

With a brazen blast of bugles the royal guard, with sabers flashing, lunged forward, an irresistible wave of death. The carnage was fearful. The broken bodies of the insurrectionists were trampled beneath the feet of the black steeds. The soldiers swept the path clean to the gate, dashed on, and cleared the streets.

The rebellion did not last an hour. But in that time five hundred sons of freedom gave up their lives, human sacrifices on the altar of liberty. Another revolt against the heavy hand of Leopold II. of Oligarchia was put down with the mailed fist. The insurrection, which the conspirators knew would follow in the royal house after the murder of the Crown Prince, came to naught.



"Had it done its work?"

Von Vlissingen, the erstwhile pawn, who had dared to dispute the royal chess player's will, had saved the day—and perhaps a throne.

CHAPTER III.

WHEN the royal cabinet reassembled at the appointed hour, as commanded by King Leopold, the monarch dismissed all save Von Vlissingen. This had little or no effect on the proceedings which followed, however, as these figurehead functionaries never actually participated in the direction of the affairs of the Government. But the prime minister had proved himself no figurehead. None was so quick to see this as Leopold who turned to him in this hour of crisis.

Leopold and Von Vlissingen—a pawn no longer—retired to the King's private chamber, the sanctum sanctorum of the kingdom.

"How came my boy by his death?" the old monarch asked quietly. Grief burdened his tone. He spoke as a father speaks and not as a king. He said "my boy" and not "the Prince."

"Your royal highness," replied Von Vlissingen, "my investigation, of course, has been brief, but the main circumstances of this dastardly crime I have fairly well in hand. Motives will come later."

"The question of motive is not open to discussion," the King interjected. "The motive is of the Orlandoff's making. But on with your story."

"I have just spoken," the prime minister resumed, "with the young Count Rowland, who caught Rudolph in his arms as he fell—dead from the assassin's bullet. The Prince had been on a hunt. With Rowland and a half-dozen other young nobles, he was returning to the capital, where the Prince, in response to the decree he knew was about to be promulgated, was to attend the ceremonies incident to his crowning as the heir apparent. They were about to emerge from the royal game preserve in the suburbs of the city. The Prince, mounted on his hunting horse rode in front. Rowland was by his side. They were chatting lightly at the moment about the opera.

"In the midst of a sentence the late Crown Prince ceased to speak. He fell limply forward onto the pommel of his saddle. He would have precipitated himself to the ground had Rowland not leaped from his own steed and grasped him. Thinking Rudolph had no more than fainted, they lifted the Prince to the greensward and bathed his forehead with a dampened handkerchief. It was not until Duke Rossky thrust a hand under the Prince's blouse to feel his heart action, that the crime was discovered.

"'My God, Rossky, there's blood on your hand!' exclaimed one, as the Duke had removed it.

"And true enough, there was, just a mere drop. Investigation showed a bullet had entered Rudolph's heart. And an extraordinary missile it was. I saw it after the surgeon had removed it from the body. It is more like a needle—a dart. It is an inch long and no more than an eighth of an inch in diameter at the blunt end. Indeed, it made such an imperceptible hole in the Prince's coat that the slight perforation in the garment could never be noticed except on the most minute examination. The wound itself bled but a few drops.

"And so the murder is a baffling one from the outset. Tho the assailant could not have projected his fatal dart any great distance because of the proximity of trees, there was no report, no explosion, no sound, no smoke or odor, such as characterizes the discharge of an ordinary firearm. Prince Rudolph was slain with a weapon hitherto unknown even to military science."

The aged ruler had given respectful attention to the minister's recital.

"My boy, my boy!" the bereft father sighed, shaking his hoary head slowly and sadly.

It was the human element of the tragedy which touched the monarch first and deepest. His son—his boy—his firstborn, was dead. But a king lives neither for himself nor his family, but for his throne. Leopold indulged himself in his tender reflections but for a moment. Then the lines of personal grief vanished from his face. A cold, clear, implacable expression of hatred replaced them. The King again was in the realm of state.

"And have you made inquiry at the department of arms and ordnance to see if our experts have any knowledge of such a weapon as might have been used by Rudolph's assassin?" Leopold addressed this question to his minister as he pressed an electric bell button at his massive desk.

"I have, your majesty," replied Von Vlissingen. "I had the mysterious missile which killed the Prince sent direct to Colonel Tirplitz for inspection."

Colonel Tirplitz was head of the department of secret military preparation.

Mulhausen, the royal secretary entered the room in response to Leopold's summons.

"Tell Colonel Tirplitz he is commanded to report to me."

"Very well, your majesty," and the secretary started to bow himself out.

"And Mulhausen——"

"Yes, your majesty."

"Meanwhile Tirplitz is to be guarded—secretly. I want his every move watched and reported to me. Understand?"

"Yes, your majesty." And with another bow the secretary had vanished.

"And now," said Leopold, turning to Von Vlissingen, "Eitel must, perforce, succeed me to the throne. I signed the document—and it is with a heavy heart I did it—in private just before you came, and have ordered the Prince to be notified and to return at once to the capital. He is at Baden University. He must give up his books and resume military training immediately.

"Foolish I have been to countenance his dabbling in the arts and sciences in place of making more consistent preparation to occupy a throne. But I had my head and my heart set on Rudolph—poor boy!

"In two months will be the ceremonial of Eitel's coronation as heir apparent. It will be a simple one, obviously, as the court will be in mourning. Thus in my old age I must begin almost where I started forty years ago to build, to weave affairs so they can be ruled by a son none too stern for the task."

Mulhausen re-entered.

"Colonel Tirplitz waits without," he announced.

"Bid him enter," said the King.

"And now," the monarch continued, addressing Von Vlissingen, "I begin the first step of my new labors. Fortunate indeed you were in losing no time in placing this mysterious death needle in Tirplitz's hands. From him I expect to obtain a clew which will reveal the damnable plot which resulted in Rudolph's murder."

"Your majesty!" exclaimed the prime minister, in an astonished whisper. "You do not accuse Colonel Tirplitz of complicity——"

Von Vlissingen's startling sentence, inspired by an equally startling construction he had placed on the King's utterance, was never finished. Colonel Tirplitz, the cast of guilt in his eyes, entered. Mulhausen—a suave individual to meet, but a man whose trigger finger never had failed him in a pinch—unnoticed by any save the King, stepped behind a screen in the room.

CHAPTER IV.

SIT down!"

Leopold hurled the command at the humbled Colonel. Tirplitz, into whose care the Government intrusted the responsibility of collecting and guarding the military secrets of the kingdom, obeyed.

"You have examined the weapon with which the Crown Prince was slain, have you not?" the monarch asked.

"I have, your majesty," Tirplitz replied quietly.

"And do you recall ever having seen it or an instrument of its likeness before?"

"Yes, your majesty, I have seen the weapon before."

Tirplitz's eyes sought the floor as he spoke. Von Vlissingen glared at him. What, the mystery solved so soon? But if the King was surprised by his reply his countenance did not betray it.

"It was a year ago," Tirplitz replied. "An eccentric inventor from one of the provinces—Menden, his name was, I believe the records will show—gained an audience with me after several rebuffs by officers of my staff."

"And then——"

Leopold hastened the story along, as Tirplitz was somewhat halting and reluctant in his statements. It was plain he either was making up the tale as he went along, or was struggling to recall incidents and dates almost effaced from memory. Which it was, neither Leopold nor his prime minister had any means of defining.

"This Menden," Tirplitz went on, "expounded to me an invention upon which he said he had worked a lifetime. He said it would revolutionize warfare."

"And this invention was——"

"A silent gun," Tirplitz replied, after a pause. "A silent gun—no noise, no smoke, no odor—a gun projecting a missile of the type of the one which killed Prince Rudolph."

Colonel Tirplitz's statement was all the more remarkable when viewed in light of the fact that he was in possession of none of the details regarding the assassination of Rudolph. He had not heard the amazing story regarding the absence of sound, smoke, or odor coincident with the firing of the fatal shot.

Again the Colonel's halting story stopped. He gazed moodily at his boots.

"And what then? What disposition did you make of the inventor and his death machine?"

The King's voice was a menace.

"I'm guilty! I'm guilty, your majesty!" Tirplitz's voice broke. "Only be merciful—merciful for the sake of the wife and the little ones who are innocent of it all!"

Tirplitz's confession was electrifying.

Leopold and the prime minister were prepared to hear almost anything—but not this. They glared at the man before them in speechless astonishment. The King's confidential agent, known even to the court as Mulhausen, the secretary, peered from his place of concealment. A thing of blue steel glinted in his hand. It was not a weapon such as had slain the Crown Prince, but for ordinary intents and purposes it was an instrument quite as deadly.

One move and he would have sent Tirplitz into eternity on the spot. But the officer sat motionless, save for the heavy heaving of his breast, with his head buried in his hands and his slender figure clutched in his long black hair.

"Do you mean to confess that you are responsible for the murder of my son, the Crown Prince?" asked Leopold, in cold, measured tones.

"I am responsible," came the affirmation from Tirplitz, without evasion.

"Search this man!" Leopold commanded, turning to the screen behind which the secretary lurked.

Mulhausen stepped forward quickly, urged the Colonel to his feet, and with swift and practiced movements made a most minute and exhaustive search of his person. Keys, papers, credentials, a fountain pen, cigarette case, watch, and the ordinary things a man carried with him were removed from the officer's clothing. There was nothing, absolutely nothing, which to outward appearances, at any rate, was a weapon—unless by a generous stretch of imagination one could calendar a small silver penknife as such.

Tirplitz stood as a man transfixed during the secretary's activity. When the search was completed he resumed his seat mechanically at the command of the King.

"You say you and you alone are responsible for the Prince's death?"

The King repeated the question in an easier tone. Tirplitz unarmed, he believed to be harmless. Mulhausen was busy in another capacity now. He was taking down the King's questions and Tirplitz's answers in shorthand.

"I am responsible," came the answer from the close-drawn, whitened lips of the Colonel.

"You said that before," the King snapped impatiently. "In what way are you responsible?"

"As an accomplice, your majesty."

"Certainly you were an accomplice," rasped Leopold, angered at the evasion; "that is, if what you have said is true. You did not murder the boy yourself. Everybody knows that you were in the executive offices at the time of the deed. Be specific. By what method were you an accomplice?"

"By my fatal mistake, your majesty."

"Your what?" exploded Leopold.

"My fatal and irretrievable error, your majesty."

"Tirplitz, this is no hour for shamming. You have confessed this murder. Now out with the whole truth."

"I have spoken the truth, your majesty," replied the Colonel, with an effort. He was growing faint—indeed was on the verge of collapse. But Leopold, blind in his fury, never noticed his distress. He drove his stinging assaults at his prisoner without reckoning consequences and without mercy.

"Doubtless you do not regret you confessed so soon!" he shouted in the badgered Tirplitz's face, his own features swollen and livid with hate. "You would fain reconsider your hasty admissions, which, under the impulse of the guilty, you have made. You would plot a way out of the predicament into which you have cast yourself.

"But these deceptions are to no purpose. You must die for your crimes. I tell you that now—and the whole traitorous band must die. And unless you here and now amplify your confession, your wife and child will die also."

Leopold paused.

"My gracious majesty," Tirplitz began, as a man on whom a great light had just dawned, "you labor under a tremendous misapprehension. What I have said is true in a manner of speaking only. Permit me to explain——"

"You explain nothing," the King flung back. "Who are your accomplices? That is all I want from you."

"Your majesty," the prisoner pleaded. "May I beg of you to permit me to retire and collect my shattered thoughts. I can make all clear then. I promise you I will not shield myself with falsehood. I have admitted my guilt, such as it is, and that admission stands. I am too near exhaustion, mental and physical, from this terrible calamity——"

"Retire and collect your shattered thoughts," the King retorted mockingly. "A pathetic plea indeed to cover your infamies. I ask you for the last time, who were your accomplices in this damnable crime?"

"There were none, your majesty," Tirplitz replied, with resignation.

"You lie!"

A quick fire flared in Tirplitz's lack-luster eyes. Never before had a man dared thus to impugn his veracity without a challenge to a duel. But the flame died away. Tirplitz knew he was powerless. He asserted his contempt as best he could by simply ignoring the King's expostulation.

"Hubert Tirplitz, you die tomorrow at sunrise. I have a record of your confession in your own words," said the King, denoting Mulhausen's activity. "It will be a public execution. I will teach these traitors a lesson. Call a guard—take this man to the dungeon death cell."

The last words were to the secretary. The guard arrived presently. Tirplitz was led away.

* * *

In America one can little comprehend the treacherous complexities of the European social stratum. Just now a great war gives us a superficial glimpse of them. We see the three greatest rulers of the Old World—blood cousins—at each other's throats. And yet we but skim the surface.

The terrible truth of intrigues and treasons directed from one throne against another the world will never know. No human hand will ever map the crisscross maze of secret pacts, binding incongruous elements into ententes and alliances. It has been said that every twenty-fifth man in Europe is a spy. The statement does not seem improbable. Your best friend, so appearing, may be the secret agent of your greatest enemy, plotting your downfall for his price.

Many a man has gone to his death on the gallows as a murderer self-confessed, who was innocent of the sin of Cain. And why? For reasons—for reasons such as exist only where thrones exist. Tirplitz was innocent of the crime charged against him, despite his admissions, so incriminating on their face.

Did he say what he said to shield some one. Some one dearer to him than life itself? Who will tell?

Time is the great adjudicator of all things. Time, perhaps, might answer this enigma. But time is the mill of the gods and it grinds slowly. Tirplitz was doomed to die on the morrow.

CHAPTER V.

THE man shrank back behind the trunk of a huge tree and waited. In his right hand was a shining instrument, small but sinister and suggestive of death. It was not unlike an automatic revolver. That, however, was before the days of automatics. But who might say this was not a weapon more deadly? The man smiled grimly upon the shining piece as it lay in his palm. Had it done its work? He was soon to know.

He peered cautiously around the trunk of the tree. He beheld an agitated knot of young men, recently dismounted, gathered about one of their number who lay upon the greensward. Their excited tones easily reached his ears.

"My God, the Prince is dead!"

The exclamation sent a thrill into the soul of the young assassin. His deed was accomplished. His dark eyes flashed in triumph. He dodged back behind the tree-trunk. The moments dragged themselves by. The young murderer clutched his instrument of death feverishly—in a sort of ecstasy. He was ready to attack at any instant. But he was not disturbed. Again he peered around the tree.

The fallen Prince Rudolph of Regalshofen had been lifted astride his horse. Held in the saddle by two companions, the dead Prince was borne away and out of the royal hunting forest.

The assassin watched the Prince's party until it was lost to view, well on the road to the capital. Then he turned and made his way alertly along the edge of the forest. One of the royal forest rangers, riding his post along the forest's boundary, approached, oblivious to the fact that the greatest crime of the reign had just been committed and that the criminal was within earshot. The young man on foot stepped adroitly behind a tree and let the ranger pass. The guard saw nothing. With a glance behind to assure himself that all was safe, the slayer continued on his way.

A striking young man was Rudolph's assassin. His raven hair and fearless dark eyes kept congenial company with his bronzed skin, tanned by life in the open. His countenance was intelligent, refined, even. That he had been born to the class which dominates the higher walks of life in Europe, was evident. No low-caste, hired murderer he. His features exuded purpose, aim, determination.

His countenance was unmarred by any telltale mark of criminality or its handmaiden, degeneracy. Just now his features were animated and aglow with a fine fire that came deep from his heart. In the assassination of the Crown Prince of the house of Regalshofen he had accomplished a great deed, he verily believed. The young zealot had slain the Prince firm in the conviction that he had performed a sacred and patriotic duty to his native land.

His swift steps took him to the remote edge of the royal game preserve. There, concealed in a little gully, was a horse, saddled and bridled and waiting. The young man threw himself into the stirrups with the alacrity of a trained cavalry officer, and the next moment the spirited steed was carrying him out of the woods.

Cleared of the forest, along the country road he sped, passing carriages, carts, and other horsemen on his way to Kolberg, the capital. Nearing the suburbs, he reined down the speed of his mount so as not to excite suspicion by his haste. He entered the town, made his way along one of the brilliant boulevards, drew up at a massive iron gate before a walled mansion.

A liveried footman appeared and opened the gate; the young man rode in. At the steps of the manse he dismounted, delivered his horse to a waiting lackey, dashed up the steps, and disappeared thru the doorway of the house.

"My son!"

A man past middle age, yet of erect, patrician bearing rushed toward the young man with outstretched arms.

"I never expected you to return alive!" he cried, embracing the youth and holding him to his breast.

"It was easier than I had anticipated, father," the murderer of the Crown Prince replied after greetings were over.

"Your name will go down in history as that of a great deliverer of the kingdom! My boy! My hero!" the father beamed. "Come, tell us about it."

The father of the young assassin was Colonel Ferdinand Metz, former grand marshal of the kingdom, and the most feared man of all the Orlandoff loyalists. Colonel Metz had disappeared when the heir of the Orlandoffs mysteriously vanished from London following the sudden death of Grand Duchess Lucile.

"The Orlandoffs are avenged!" the father burst forth anew. "Tyranny is crushed! From the first the cause of liberty is victorious! But come, Nicholas, my brave boy, the others anxiously await your story."

And so saying Colonel Metz led his son into the presence of the conspirators.

* * *

Two hours later they emerged from the room. Young Nicholas, still the center of an admiring group, was the recipient of ardent felicitations. Yet flattery had not turned the young man's head. He smiled and thanked his admirers, and seemed ill at ease in the role of hero.

"Your excellency," he reported, addressing the Colonel, "the rebellion has failed. The palace guard charged the populace which had been wrought up by our agitators, and dispersed them with great slaughter."

"It is no more than we expected," Metz replied coolly. "The demonstration was planned only to distract attention from our other business at hand and facilitate the escape of Nicholas to the city. Yet these risings, even if they do fail now, accomplish a purpose. They sow seeds of discontent thruout the empire. The Orlandoffs will be welcomed when we execute our final coup and seize the throne.

"There is only Eitel to get out of the way, and the throne is ours," the Colonel continued, as the plotters donned their coats and took their hats and prepared to leave. "We will not concern ourselves with Prince [illegible], the youngest son, unless he should make an unexpected appearance in the kingdom and rescind his vows renouncing all claims to his father's throne, all of which, I have good reason to believe, is impossible.

"The fruits of our labors and our waiting are soon to be in our hands. We are content to await the natural death of old Leopold, which cannot be longer than a year or so hence. It will be better that we do this. Chaos will undermine his health. He is an old man and will not long bear up under the strain.

"But in the end our propaganda cannot fail. Our system is too well perfected, nothing can go wrong. Have we not our secret agent even within the royal palace, spying on and reporting every move the old despot makes?" The Colonel paused that his words might be doubly effective, then resumed slowly: "Is not this man, one of the most powerful men of the Regalshofen regime, in our employ? We could kill the old King as he sleeps, and none would we wiser. But such is unnecessary. Gentlemen, the battle is won. The Orlandoffs will rule Oligarchia."

The plotters, all men of high birth and breeding, apparently, took their leave of Colonel Metz and Nicholas, and one by one left the mansion. The old man, the arch-conspirator, and his son, the royal assassin, were left alone in the great house of mystery.

Night had fallen. The two retired to the Colonel's private study. The old man sank into his great chair and gazed into the leaping flames of the fireplace. Nicholas seated himself where he could study his father's thoughtful face. There was no light in the room save that of the fire. The effect was weird and ghostly. It was a long time before either spoke.

"Well, old Menden's invention did its work, didn't it, son?" mused the Colonel, speaking half to himself.

"Yes," Nicholas rejoined, after a pause. "It was a fortunate day for the Orlandoffs when Tirplitz dismissed him as an idle dreamer, and refused to witness a test of his silent pistol."

"And a fateful day for the house of Regalshofen," the aged plotter added.

This story, developing very thrilling happenings, will be continued in the Ledger issue of next week. If you are not a subscriber to the Ledger we would like to have your name on our list. The Ledger is only $1.00 per year; it is worth many times that amount. Send in your subscription, for many great stories that you cannot afford to miss will appear during the coming months.

* * *

A Wonderful Telescope.

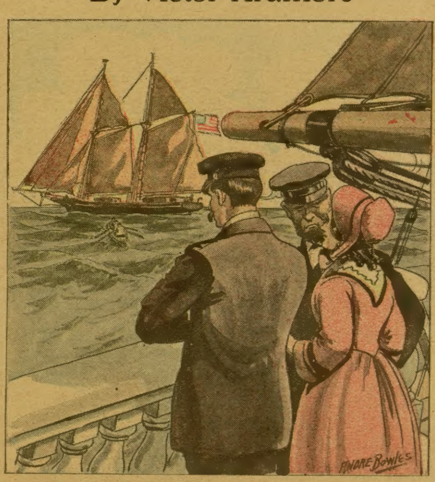
A Scotsman was one day observing to a friend that he had an excellent telescope.

"Do you see yon kirk?" said he. "Altho it's scarcely discernible with the naked eye, when I look at it thru my telescope it brings it so close I can hear the organ playing."

Mazeppa of the Sea

Or, The Brig of Mystery

By Victor Ardmore



A boat left the schooner.

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CHAPTER VII.

THE scene was interesting to the passengers. The Laugh of Day was holding a course west by north and out of that quarter had come the schooner whose character nobody could yet guess. The two neared each other with every pulse of their sails, and the news had gone abroad that a certain unusual flag on the smaller craft was the private emblem of Jackson Brothers, owners of the ship.

The two goers of the deep drew nearer, were brought to almost as one, and then a boat left the schooner and was pulled across the intervening space. The officer in command was greeted by Captain Foskett as an old acquaintance, they shook hands, exchanged a few words, and went below.

An hour later they reappeared, said good-by, the stranger entered his boat again, and was pulled back toward his own craft. Before he reached it Foskett gave orders that amazed everybody else in the ship. The Laugh of Day was brought about and started in the direction opposite to that she had previously been pursuing. Before, her bows had been pointing at New Orleans. Now, they were each instant drawing so much nearer to Paramaribo. The astonishment of the crew and passengers was soon dispelled, for the captain called all hands and the passengers and bade them listen.

"Naturally," he said, "I have surprised you all, but I will not keep you in the dark. We have all known that war is afoot between the North and South of our own country, but few particulars reached us in Dutch Guinea. As a result I started for New Orleans with a cargo billed to that one of my three owners who is a merchant in the latter city. He, however, learned that Northern warships were in the Southern coast, waiting to capture inward bound ships. He is a stout Northern man, having been born and bred there, but he did not want to lose his ship and its valuable cargo.

"As a result, he dispatched the schooner Lapwing to meet me in Paramaribo before I sailed. Unfortunately, she ran into a bad squall, lost a mast, and sprung a leak below the waterline, so she had to put into Havana for repairs. When they were completed she started south again, on the one chance in a hundred that she would encounter me afloat.

"The one chance stood by her, for we met exactly as was desired. Luck, my friends, good luck, but something that wouldn't happen again in a hundred tries.

"Now, my new orders from my owner in New Orleans were clear and full. If I had left port when I encountered the Lapwing I was to put back. I have put back, as you see.

"Friends, I am Northern-born and raised, and my heart is with my section of the country in this war, but I owe a duty to my owners. If I permit this ship to be seized by a Northern vessel, she and her cargo will be confiscated, and that will be a great money loss to that one of Jackson Brothers who does business in New Orleans. It is my duty to stand by him as if sworn on a Bible.

"I have another duty. I am relied upon to do my best in all ways, no matter what the circumstances, to guard and preserve the ship of which I am captain, no matter whether from storm, pirates, war vessels, or other things. That is my duty as a man.

"Now, as soon as conditions permit, I shall enlist in the Northern navy and fight for my section, but while I'm master of the Laugh of Day I'm going to do my best to keep her out of the hands of Northern warships, and to save her cargo for my owner. If I did otherwise I should detest myself to the end of my life."

Breaking off he turned sharply upon the crew.

"Lads," he said keenly, "like myself you are State of Maine men. What do you say to my position in this matter?"

"We say," shouted a burly sailor, "that we feel the same call of duty that you do. Jackson Brothers have first claim on us."

Others spoke, and a cheer followed. Then Foskett turned to the passengers.

"Ladies and gentlemen," he said, "will you pass judgment?"

Mr. Allen impulsively grasped the captain's hand.

"Sir," he exclaimed, "I am with you in this. I want to get to our home port, but we realize your situation and know that blockade running would be hazardous and foolish. Your owner has ordered you back to Paramaribo, and it's your duty to go."

"And," added Hadlock, "we shall all know that we are sailing with a man who, having placed duty above all else, can be relied upon to carry us to the remotest corner of the earth, if need be, with fidelity."

Every one of the passengers crowded forward to add a word, and the captain's set face lightened. It was good to have all with him in this unique case, to know that all approved of his reasons. More was said as the Laugh of Day hastened along on the backtrack, but when Foskett found that he was no longer the center of all regards he stepped closer to Eleanor and spoke in a subdued voice.

"Miss Goldsmith," he remarked, "perhaps this will turn to your good, for we are now sailing toward that quarter where the brig Swiftstep was last seen."

The light of happiness flashed into her eyes.

"Heaven bless you, sir!" she exclaimed.

"Somehow, I feel a conviction that we shall encounter that man who is chained to the masthead."

"Ah, but he may not be alive now."

"Why not? If he lived so long he surely has a way of getting food and water, and why shouldn't it continue?"

"I've been thinking that some unknown man, coming in a boat, found the brig and boarded her, but is so evil that he will not release Mr. Warner."

"Then why should he feed him?"

"Perhaps he is an escaped criminal, and dares not give him liberty."

Foskett meditated carefully upon this surmise.

"It may be you are right, and such a condition would solve many of the perplexities of the situation as we see it. Such a man would, of course, not signal for help, and might not think it wise to make any change in the sails, but I should expect him to unlash the wheel and steer for some quarter where he could find safety."

Eleanor sighed deeply. "Every theory we raise has some element to make it seem unlikely."

"True," Foskett agreed. "On the whole I am inclined to the belief that, tho our mutineer affirms that he was the last to leave the top, and that no food was there then, some softer-hearted sailor stole back and placed eatables and drink there, but—but——"

"Yes, sir?"

"Hum! If he was decent enough to do that he would have given the chained man a file or some other thing with which he could sever the chain. Yes, yes, it's true that all theories fall to the ground when studied. Very singular, I confess!"

The discussion ended, for it had reached the usual point. No matter what surmise was entertained there was always something to challenge it sharply, and show that it was not reasonable. The brig Swiftstep was still a deep mystery.

Captain Foskett remained on deck more than usual. He did not expect to see any warship, but it was his task to avoid them, and he was not inclined to take life too easily when trouble might be awaiting him just beyond his bows.

He had never admired the fast-going Laugh of Day more than then, and his attention was often on her upper works and hull. The best that State of Maine builders could do had been done when she was laid down. Without being rakish, she was long and admirably moulded, a greyhound of the seas. Her sheer was inanimate grace, her bulwarks dainty but strong, and her masts rose in spires that seemed to fit the romantic name his wife had bestowed upon the craft when she was launched.

"If we do meet a warship," he mused proudly, "the Laugh of Day will soon leave her hull down!"

It was good to be fit for flight, and he smiled satisfaction.

The night that followed was moonless, and a film of gray clouds partly covered the sky, but the outlook for a safe stretch was so good that, at three bells in the first night watch, he went below, leaving Eveleth in charge with the port division.

Some hours of rest came, but he was finally awakened by knocking at the door, and he dressed and got on deck as soon as possible. His orders had been strict, and the call was in accordance with his plan.

The middle watch had begun, two bells having been struck shortly before, and he found Barton awaiting him.

"Light off the bows, sir," the mate reported quickly. "It's a couple points wide of our course, but it's too big for a deck-light. We were late in seeing it, having only just come out of a fog-bank. I called you at once."

"Quite right, Barton."

Foskett looked hard. Seen from the distance the light was a steady ball of fire, but nothing more. Clouds had thickened, giving more darkness on the sea, and the fire was like a gigantic eye.

"What do you make of her, sir?" the mate added.

"Hardly a vessel on fire, unless a very small one, and we are so near that, even if it were that, we should see more of upward spurting. Seems to me like a flare."

"Just what I thought, sir."

"Shift your helm a couple of points and run for her. If anybody is in distress we want to be there."

The captain stood motionless, watching, but his mind was active. Conditions were such in the Caribbean that he felt more than common interest, and his thoughts often wandered to Eleanor.

"I almost wish she was here," he mused, "but it would be unfair to call her and awaken ungrounded hopes. Perhaps——"

"I think, sir, I can see some sparks rising now, but it can hardly be a burning vessel of any size. A call for help, sir."

"Yes, I think so. Must be a flare. I wonder——"

He stared at the ball of light, unconsciously leaning forward.

"I suppose it's too good luck that it should be the brig Swiftstep."

CHAPTER VIII.

THE Laugh of Day drew nearer steadily, and what had been a theory at the beginning had become a certainty. A small vessel was in difficulty, and burning a call for help. It was, in fact, so small that Captain Foskett was disappointed, its size proclaiming it of smaller tonnage than the Swiftstep was reputed to be. Running his vessel to leeward, the skipper hailed.

"Ship ahoy! What's the trouble here?"

There was a stir of the figures around the flare that showed clearly, and the men facing outward to where the lights of the ship burned waved their arms excitedly.

"Ahoy!" was the quick reply. "We are sinking. Ran into a wreck or something and stove a hole in our hull, as well as smashing our only boat. We are taking in water like a sieve, and almost gone. She will take her plunge mighty soon."

"How many of you?"

"Four, sir."

"I'll send a boat."

The ship was brought to with all dispatch and her boat lowered. Foskett stood patiently while it was gone. The Swiftstep had not been sighted, but there was chance to save human life. Evidently the stranger had but little worth saving, for the boat pulled back sooner than was to be expected. Four men scrambled to the deck, and their leader thanked Foskett with hearty readiness. Having the business instinct he came to explanations without delay.

"We are the sloop Getalong, sir, a little old craft not worth much. I am Captain Pettley. We've been to Barbados with cargo, but were coming home in ballast, so there's no great grief but for the sloop, and she's insured for all she's worth. No very big loss, except to the underwriters but it would have been different if we had drowned. It was a close call. All the pumps in Christendom wouldn't have kept her free, for she must have stove a hole big as a cook's galley. It's good-by to the Getalong, but why should mortals be sad?"

"You're a philosopher, I see. Well, have you brought everything off?"

"All, sir, so you can slip away as soon as you choose. Nothing to stop for, since we——"

He broke off and then resumed in a more serious manner.

"There's somebody else nigh that's in trouble—I guess."

"How is that?"

"Well, it's like this. Just a little while after we started our flare we was suddenly astonished to get a hail out of the night. We had used our eyes sharp to get sight of possible lights on a vessel, but had seen none, yet that hail was almost alongside us. The first words were—'Help, help! I am abandoned and alone, and chained fast to the mast!'"

"Who said that?" demanded Foskett, sharply.

"We all made her out as a brig, but could tell no more, because of the dark and the distance. We saw no man at all. We didn't at first sense what he shouted to us, and began halloing for help, ourselves. Then his voice came clear—'I can do nothing for you. Mutineers have left me alone, and I'm in the foretop, chained to the masthead so I can do nothing. I've been here eleven days——'"

The speaker paused and shook his head.

"That was all that come to us clear, sir, for the brig was going away all the while, running with the wind, and she went out of sight with the man still calling. It was as if he tried to give us particulars of something or other, but we couldn't hear what."

"Did he seem very weak?"

"Weak? Well, I can't answer for his body, but his voice came clear as a bell and strong as a shipmaster's. Some of us thought the feller was mean enough to joke at us, while others said different——"

"You say she showed no light?"

"Nary light, sir. But wait a bit! There was no deck-lights, but Briggs, one of my mates, said he see a tiny ball of fire waving in the top, as if the feller was moving a lighted cigar about. Still, Briggs has eyes that are always seeing what nobody else can see, and as I want to be charitable, I can't credit that a lone man in distress should be having a jolly smoke in the top."

"How long ago was this?"

"Maybe an hour, sir."

Barton was already getting the Laugh of Day under way again, but the captain turned and bade him hasten the work of the men.

"I say," spoke up Briggs, stubbornly, "that that man was smoking. Nothing else makes the same glow in the dark as a lighted cigar——"

"But," remonstrated Pettley, "you couldn't see such a pin point that distance away——"

"I did see it, and I think I smelled the smoke of it."

The other rescued men laughed in concert.

"Briggs has gone clean crazy now," scoffed one of the three.

Foskett had heard without giving keen attention, but as he turned back to the men he studied the situation. Irad Warner was still in the top, and still chained, but his voice was clear and firm, and unless Briggs was in error, was able to smoke. It was dumfounding, for, by all the laws of nature, he should have been dead long before.

"Eleven days chained to the masthead, and without food or water!" Foskett muttered blankly. "Mazeppa of the sea beats the original of that name."

"There goes the old Getalong!" exclaimed one of her crew. "Just took her last plunge, and bound down to visit Davy Jones. We was took off none too soon, but she waited for us to get to safety, the sloop did. She always was a perfect lady. Ah's me!"

Foskett had really heard all he was to learn, but, not yet satisfied, he questioned the wrecked men minutely. One thing only came of it that was impressive—they were agreed that the man in the top seemed to be in excellent condition.

"But how can he be?" the captain wondered. "If he's alive he must have had food, but it's ridiculous to suppose he had it with him from the start, for it would have decayed in this heat long ago, if stored where he is. How does he get it? We have his own word for it that he is alone in the brig, so there's nobody to bring him eatables or drink. Has some desperate scoundrel come aboard who menaces him with a gun and compels him to call for help—but no! Such a fellow would not want anybody to board the brig. A hopeless riddle to grapple with!"

Foskett did not leave the deck until near morning. His intense interest led him to take charge of the efforts to find the Swiftstep, and he did his best.

For a time the unique chase was rapid, but when the ship had gone far enough to fetch near the derelict, as was supposed, sail was reduced and tacking resorted to, in order to cover as much sea as possible. It was well thought out, but difficulties arose. A white fog settled, and view was limited to a space a few fathoms beyond the vessel.

The Swiftstep was not found, and at last the captain went to get a little sleep. He woke in the morning to find the fog as thick as ever, and no report relating to the derelict.

Eleanor had heard the story from some one else, but she finally came to the captain.

"What, sir, do you make of the situation as to the Swiftstep?" she asked.

"The chief point is that we are meeting with the same perverse fate that has baffled other would-be rescuers. Had the night been clear we should have sighted her, but the blanket of fog beat us. The consoling item is that we are in the same waters with her now."

"True, true!" the girl exclaimed, her eyes sparkling. "We must see her when the mist lifts."

"Another consoling item," replied Foskett, who tried to comfort when he had little hope.

"But if she changes her course——"

"She can't, if this wind holds. She's bound to go our way."

"But isn't our speed much faster than hers?"

"Somewhat, tho we are, for several reasons, under reduced sail, so we are making inconsequential headway. Frequent tacking, last night, made us lose way, and as the Swiftstep would stick to one course we may come upon her at any time."

"It is noble of you to try so hard!" she exclaimed.

Others would do the same for me, for the men of the sea have hearts like Gibraltars, but as for this case, why, lass, cheer up!—we are going to sight that brig if such a thing is possible!"

CHAPTER IX.

THAT day the body of the dead mutineer was consigned to the sea, Captain Foskett reading the Episcopal burial service over his remains, and expressing the belief that the man who had been asleep in the brig until after the two officers were killed would receive due charity at the hands of a Merciful Judge.

The fog held, and the Laugh of Day was under sail that would make navigation as far safe as possible. Meanwhile, lookouts were aloft to watch for the derelict.

Shortly before noon the two young ladies were sitting together on deck, unmindful of the mist.

"Eleanor," said Martha, softly, "you never told me you were engaged to Irad Warner."

"I know, dear, I know," was the soft reply; "but if I had made any confidante it would have been you. That I didn't—well, most girls, as soon as they are engaged, are crazy to have the yhole world know it, but anything like that seems too sacred to me to be flung around among everybody and joked about. It is like sacrilege to me. Am I eccentric?"

"No, no! When thought is given to it, all must agree with you. Such a matter should not be hastily made the property of unsympathetic persons. An engagement is a private event, and should be kept so. So your choice was a sailor?"

"With my past experiences I could choose nobody else."

"Surely, an intelligent, worthy sea officer is all that is manly and desirable——"

Martha's speech fell away as her eyes roamed. Eleanor saw she was unconsciously looking at Mate Eveleth, but resolutely repressed a wise smile and made no comment. Presently Martha gave a slight start and her gaze came back.

"I've heard you mention Mr. Warner," she resumed, "but did not suspect he was more to you than any other friend. You've always known him?"

"Ever since we were children. We were early friends. He went to sea young, and has many deeds of heroism to his credit. The last I heard of him he was second made of the ship Gay Rider, Captain Osborn. How he happened to be in the Swiftstep I can't imagine, but I was in a way prepared. Shortly before we left Paramaribo I overheard two men talking about a certain shipmaster named Brodwin, whom they called unfit for any command, but said he had the hermaphrodite brig Swiftstep; so they hoped he would keep sober. They also mentioned that the first mate was as bad as Brodwin, but the second mate, Warner, was a good officer."

"Warner! Didn't they mention his first name?"

"No, and as they were utter strangers I hadn't courage and quick enough thought to speak to them. Just then, I remembered that there were many persons named Warner, and thought it only a coincidence."

"Of course you had no clew."

"No. Still, when we got to sea and I heard mention of a brig of that kind in such odd stress I naturally grew interested. You will remember we never heard the name of her—the Swiftstep—mentioned until the mutineer told his story."

"I see."

"Now, Irad——"

Eleanor had been retaining her composure with an effort, but her endurance was so near its collapse that she stopped, lips trembling and eyes filled with tears. Martha patted her hand affectionately.

"No, don't you worry, dear. We are going to pick the Swiftstep up, and we know Mr. Warner is still strong and well. He is surely getting food and water somehow——"

"But how?—how?"

"I don't know!" Martha sighed.

"Captain Foskett has admitted that if a repentant mutineer placed these things in the top before leaving they would, in this heat, have decayed long before. And Irad has repeatedly shouted to passing vessels that he is alone in the brig. There is nobody to bring him food."

Martha stirred uneasily, utterly depressed by a situation she could not explain. If Warner was alive, how had he lived?

Hadlock approached and the subject was changed. That young man had the faculty of never making himself obtrusive, and finding that he was welcome, he remained with them and talked in his usual agreeable way. Diplomacy rarely deserted him. Andrew Jenkinson, hovering at a distance, smiled secretly and caressed his mustache with satisfaction.

"The boy is making headway!" he mused. "Always welcomed by the girls, and plainly gaining ground in our scheme. A very slick lad, James is. But why not? Didn't I teach him—didn't I teach him to pick a pocket, forge a check, talk men into investing much in nothing, and to be agreeable to the ladies? Er-r-r!—I'm not so sure about the latter item. Plausibility was born in him, and it crops out without instruction. A neat lad, James is, but, I say, why not? Aye, why not, when he has such a father?"

Mr. Jenkinson smiled contentedly. Compliments were pleasing to him, even when he had to rely upon himself to give them.

"But," he thought, growing sober, "what if the boy should fall in love with the wrong girl?"

It was an hour later that Hadlock was at liberty, but his father had waited patiently and lost no time in accosting him.

"Jimmy," he said abruptly, "I'm going to make a try tonight."

"The diamonds?" asked Hadlock, ungraciously.

"Hang the diamonds! Uncut, and worth only five thousand. It's that document I want—you know. That paper means a hundred thousand dollars for us to have and hold. I've dangled bait before all hands, and don't know yet who has it. Confided to some person to carry safely to New Orleans, but to whom? The natural custodian is the captain, and you know he has a safe in his cabin. I'm going to crack that safe tonight!"

"Impossible! You will be caught at it."

"Not if you back me up. Now, at an hour selected by me, I want you to claim that you hear a hail in the darkness of night. That will get attention from all, and Foskett and his two mates will all be on deck, as well as the passengers. Then I'll tap the safe."

"But the steward——"

"Leave him to me, lad."

"Are you looking for a rope?"

"Only for you, and that one of silk, to wit, a matrimonial noose. You know my way. Will you help me by sounding a false report?"

"Yes," Hadlock answered curtly.

"Good! Tonight I see the inside of Foskett's safe!"

Next week's Ledger will contain further chapters of this remarkable story. You will miss a great treat if you do not read it to the end. We will give you constantly the very best stories of entertainment that money will buy, so send in your subscription and take the Ledger regularly, if you are not doing so. You will not regret it.

* * *

NEW YEAR'S PHILOSOPHY.

Nineteen fifteen here is at end.
And still I hold in mind a vision fine,
A god of love is mine,
And humankind a friend.

A score or more of failures glare
Like beasts of prey to snatch away content—
But I shall not lament
What's done, is done for fair.

For this I also know full well,
Ne'er saved or certified by vain regret
Was spilled milk, as yet
And vain regret is hell.

On temples brown the silvering loom
Of Time doth weave a record web, I ween,
Of passing years, unseen
And silent as the tomb.

But what care I at all
With dearest pal and children at my side
And gold enough beside
And roof to cover all?

With hand of steel and heart of love
And brain and eye, and conscience fairly clear,
'Tis good to live, I fear
Not Death, 'tis Life I love.

Then hail! The young year's vim and dash
That beckons all to win anew the race,
Some records good to face,
Some precedents to smash.

—Arthur M. Corwin.

* * *

In the Way.

"I think it is perfectly terrible," observed Mrs. Osher, "the way the young soldiers get married and then go and get killed."

"Ought they to get killed first?" asked Osher, whose coffee was too hot and whose cakes were not well done.

"Think of the poor offspring that will never know any paternal parent!" continued Mrs. Osher, adding cream to cool her husband's coffee.

"What in the dickens does offspring want with a paternal parent?" asked Osher. "I am sure that our own children, for instance, would get along just as well without me."

"It is true that you aren't much good at warming the baby's milk," agreed Mrs. Osher. "Nor at carrying the baby without undue exposure of her lower extremities, nor at finding anything that has gotten lost in her little crib."

"Nor anything else," admitted Osher. "The less the paternal parent has to do with the offspring the better. If anything is wrong he never knows whether it's pins, colic, or a button.

"If you want any further proof consider the cat! A paternal cat never comes butting around interfering with family affairs. When the offspring arrives he beats it immediately and lies down to sleep in the sun a mile away.

"That's better than butting in with a lot of stuff about the baby needing a handkerchief, or turning him in at headquarters for eating some wardrobe or banisters or shoes or something. It is much better. I expect if the father cat came around and reported the kittens as eating this and that he would get a swat on the jaw for his pains.

"And the father cat knows this to be so. That's why he beats it and acts indifferent. He yawns and stretches himself and strolls away, not because he wouldn't like to step up and dictate the family program, but because he knows a jarring sensation will come to him mighty sudden if he tries anything of the sort.

"It is the same in the dog family. The offspring arrives and Pa Dog goes up to take a look and Ma Dog says, 'Gr-r-r!' Then Pa Dog sees something intensely interesting over on a hill five miles away.

"He is wise. That's why I say the paternal parent is sensible if he has a war to go to, where there may be some chance of victory, or, at least, honorable defeat."

A Wolverine Lumberjack

Or, My Lady of the Wilderness

By Mason Ray

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CHAPTER XIV.

DURING the next two weeks Madeline again battled with Death while the entire settlement waited, breathless, for the result. Bat Davitt, the local pugilist and all-around-tough, lay white and helpless on his snow-white pillow of the nurse's furnishing, and watched Madeline's every move with puzzled stare. Mrs. Davitt, gaunt, nervous, and incapable, obeyed the self-appointed doctor's least suggestion, while Rob, the Terror, gave doglike fidelity and untiring devotion.

At the end of the first week Madeline became aware of two facts concerning Rob. She discovered that Mrs. Davitt was not his own mother, that she had married Bat Davitt some six or eight years before, and that the boy and his stepmother were far from being congenial. The second item had a distinct bearing on Phil's trapping experience, since Rob, impelled by remorse, confessed that he had aided Rast Quick in his scheme of revenge.

The boy made no defense. He was ready to pay the penalty of his misdeed. That he suffered intensely from shame and regret was beyond doubt. Madeline believed that the lad had beneath his rough exterior warm and generous impulses. She believed his environment was at the root of his depravity, that his real nature would, under right influence, break the ice of evil constraint, and become a pure sparkling river of irresistible power. When she made known Rob's briefly told confession to Floyd, she asked that the offenders be left to her mercy.

"Deal with them as you will," Floyd told her. "If you can save the son as well as the father your task deserves every aid we can give."

With full permission to work out the sequel according as events shaped, Madeline went about her mission of healing the sick. At the expiration of the second week Bat Davitt's iron constitution had triumphed, with the assistance of his persevering nurse. There still remained five weeks of endurance while the bones of the broken limb knit at the fractures, five weeks for Madeline to call each day, watch the bandages and splints, care for the patient's general health, and counsel patience. Not daring to delay the school work longer, she gave the director notice of her plans, and started classes the following Monday.

The rough plaster-chinked walls, the deal benches, the dingy windows, the water pail on the section of log in the corner, and the great box stove in its bed of sand had a new aspect that brilliant March morning. Even the children, with their subdued manner, seemed of different mold from the turbulent element of that last week. Madeline rang the bell and sat observant and slightly apprehensive while the older pupils sifted into place. Zoe Higbee with her mates settled in the wide seat at the back, but to Madeline's—and Zoe's—astonishment, the opposite desk was appropriated by Dan Jobbin and two of the First Reader boys. To add materially to their amazement, it was noted that Rast Quick and Sim had parted company and were near the front with new seat-mates; but above all, Madeline was relieved at the concerted action of the two boys who now almost equally shared her devotion. Thru tear-dimmed eyes she observed that Phil and Bob Davitt were stowing their books in the desk of a front seat. They had not only buried the hatchet of ill will, but had commenced a comradeship that was lifelong. From that day the lads were inseparable and their influence far-reaching. What Madeline desired came to pass. Teaching in District Number Four was no longer a terrifying ordeal.

Toward the last of the month, winter showed signs of dissolution. The snow softened by day and froze to adamantine hardness by night. Bare stretches of earth appeared in roadways; Steel and Hawley's night workers sprinkled logging roads with the water cart that they might freeze into condition for the next day's haul. April first was ushered in by a salvo of heaven's artillery, and the same triumphant salute marked the last day of Madeline's school.

After that date Sam and Phil were at liberty to join the universal sugar-making that dotted every settler's "bush" with wooden troughs into which dripped the sweet, colorless fluid. Sally watched her bright tins being confiscated for the saccharine cause with much grumbling. As his wife's grumbling had—like excessively administered drugs—lost disturbing power, Sam reveled in the delight of sap-boiling. About his head the sweet steam rose in a cloud, to waft sidewise with the first breeze, the sun glinted enchantingly thru the bare treetops, and gemmed the hard-crusted snow with dazzling brightness, the birds multiplied in gay numbers, and innumerable squirrels frisked unabashed at human presence. Night frost with succeeding days of warm sun caused sap dishes to overflow in every sugar-bush of the region. And since Sally called a vigorous halt on the subtraction of pails, tubs, pans, and crocks from her precincts, Sam was forced to manufacture wooden troughs.

"Dem's good 'nuff to be messin' 'round dat bush wid," she declared. "So yo' jes' brung m' kitchen 'tensils back whar dey come from."

Each morning Phil presided over the large iron kettle of violently boiling sap while he cut up lengths of dried brush for the fire. Occasionally the thin syrup would rise threateningly, but a dipperful of cold sap at the crucial moment tamed its ebullitions. In extreme emergencies an added pork rind kept down the foaming sweet. The boy stood watchful guard one morning amid the syrup-scented scene, when Jud Coon approached on his way to Agache.

"Hello!" he called genially, as he dropped the lines of his sanguine bay mare and climbed over brush to where the kettle hung in the wood lot. "Thought I'd stop an' see how you was gittin' on with the sugarin'!"

"We've got sugar to burn," declared Phil. "Sam let a panful scorch last night trying to make wax."

"Yes, sir, this here sun's milkin' sap out o' the trees by the barrel," Mr. Coon commented with delight. "We've filled a tub with soft, an' expect to make two hundredweight o' hard sweetening before sap quits."

"Oh, it's great," Phil admitted. "We're sugaring off indoors to save time. Sally finishes up at home in the kitchen."

"You just orter see them makin' sugar over to the Injun camp," declared Mr. Coon, with a burst of laughter. "They've got a trick 'ud beat your pork rind boiler." Memory of the Indian method, for a moment, convulsed the small man with merriment then he continued: "Sure's I'm born every kettle has a muskrat tied to the handle by his tail; when the syrup hikes up to overrun it gits grease outen the varmint's snout an' settles back like it wants to get way." Again the director was overcome by the recollection. "Old Pete Shebonga sells sugar to the lumberjacks, an' they wonder what makes it taste musky," he told Phil, gleefully. "But they don't know the cream o' the whole business," he said mysteriously. "They don't know that the papooses swim in the sap troughs."

Having unburdened himself of this bit of savory information, Mr. Coon went off laughing, picked up his lines, climbed to his seat, clucked to the sleeping mare to go on, and slowly proceeded on his interrupted course.

Sam, with Bruno romping at his heels, came up at the moment with pails of freshly gathered sap.

"We-uns'll shorely hatter boil all night," he announced. "Dat ar bush's jes' spillin' ober."

Consequently, that night and many nights after, a circle of forest was illumined by leaping tongues of flame beneath the iron kettle. Nearly every sugar orchard in the settlement duplicated this saccharine vigil, and about the dancing flame-light—a witching fire that burned a brilliant painting on night's black screen—forms flitted in and out of shadow or stood in the red glow.

Sugaring-off parties were held wherever ascended clouds of the sweet incense, and the Bretts were no exception. Madeline sent for India Blair to join them Saturday night—the evening that Floyd and Mann assisted Sam at his orgies. And India, arriving early, met Sally, egg-laden, at the door.

"Dem fool critters didn't git 'em," gloated Aunt Sally, in an extraordinary form of greeting.

"The eggs?" laughed India.

"Yes'm," Sally explained. "Dem pesky hens done et their heads off all winter; an' now dey jes' wanter laze roun' an' eat dere eggs. Yes'm, fowls is awful human."

"How did you come?" Madeline questioned her friend in astonishment, as she settled her in an easy chair before the sitting-room fire.

"I walked," confessed India. "It's a delight to step on bits of the old, familiar earth. I enjoyed it immensely."

"Then you shall stay over," planned Madeline. "After we've had warm sugar at the bush, it will be too late for you to return. I'll keep you all day tomorrow, too. You know it's Sunday and there's church."

"Does—does Mr. Floyd come over to this sugaring-off?" questioned India, but her eyes were downcast and her fingers busy with a scarf.

"Of course," said Madeline. "He and Forest Mann come over from Agache. You know camp broke up with the exception of a few teamsters and loaders. They're rushing work at the Company's big mill. Even Jim, the cook, is at the Lakeside boarding-house taking care of the transferred crew."

India knew all this. She was well aware that Steel and Hawley were fitting out the big mill at the lower end of Muskrat Lake ready for day and night shifts to supply logs and remove lumber from the ever-booming gang saws. She knew that when ice moved from the imprisoned lake there would ensue a scene of activity. But there was one thing she did wish to learn, and the happy light glinting in her eyes showed that her friend had supplied the information.

Sally, like a benevolent satyr, was bending over a pan of thickly bubbling sweet, with Madeline and India by her side and Sam and Phil stoking fire, when the lumbermen arrived.

The group was worthy a Rembrandt's brush. Firelight lent a glow to each absorbed face. A white cloud of uprising steam etherealized the whole, while Sam's last addition to the coals sent up a shower of jeweled sparks. Above was the gray-pillared dome of forest, and about them the velvet wall of night.

"You're posing!" cried Floyd. "Nothing so perfect in grouping ever came by chance."

"You here?" was Mann's greeting to the one his glad eyes singled from the living picture.

"Why not?" defied India. "I'm here and I walked."

Her dancing eyes wickedly challenged. She laughed at his look of dismay.

"That is madness," he declared seating himself at her side on a fallen log. "It is foolhardy daring."

"I can't turn prisoner," she defended. "I'd be my own keeper, and the keeper would be outwitted at every turn."

Mann made no response. He was gazing at the leaping spurts of flame, but what he really saw was a skulking shadow near that very spot, an elusive shadow that had merged into the forest after a cowardly attempt on his life.

"I believe," he said finally, voicing his apprehensive thoughts, "that the next move will be something unforeseen, something different."

"What do you mean?" India demanded.

"That there will be no more log-spiking. The next attempt to stop payment on the mortgage—if that's the object—will be marked by originality."

Their discussion was interrupted by Madeline Brett and Sally, who offered servings of the odorous, light brown sweet. Then Floyd and Phil brought pans of clean snow gathered in shaded hollows for the wax-making; but Bruno stayed with Sam and shared his generous pan of sticky syrup laid on snow and warranted to wad his teeth until clawing paws relieved the pleasing misery.

The homeward way was impeded with fallen trees and brush. Floyd and his son walked in advance of Sam's lantern glow, while Madeline and Sally followed the light. But India, by feminine wile, managed to keep Mann beyond the lantern's pale at her side. Once she stumbled and would have fallen but her escort firmly clasped the hand resting on his arm. And thus, with her warm fingers in his protecting palm, the two unavowed lovers passed over the patches of snow, the leaf-strewn arcades of bare forest, and the fields that led to the cottage.

"When do you return home?" he questioned, as they stood outside the door before their parting.

"Tomorrow evening after church,"

Commence the Year Right

IF WITH pleasure you are viewing any work
a man is doing,
If you like him or you love him tell him
now.
Don't withhold your approbation till the parson makes oration
And he lies with snowy lilies o'er his brow;
For no matter how you shout it he won't
really care about it;
He won't know how many teardrops you
have shed;
If you think some praise is due him, now's
the time to slip it to him,
For he cannot read his tombstone when he's dead.

More than fame and more than money is the comment kind and sunny
And the hearty, warm approval of a friend,
For it gives to life a savor and it makes you stronger, braver,
And it gives you heart and spirit to the end;
If he earns your praise—bestow it; if you like him let him know it;
Let the words of true encouragement be said;
Do not wait till life is over and he's underneath the clover,
For he cannot read his tombstone when he's dead.

she told him, wondering what his reply might be.

"Then, I'll be on hand to see that you get back safe," he declared in the same impersonal tone he used in reading off reports of timber scale. "We'll take no risk."

Just then Floyd, bearing a lantern, joined them; the two bade India good night, secured the waiting team of bays, and left for their new lodgings on the lakeshore, a half-mile from Agache.

"What can it all mean?" thought India, as she stood braiding her abundant dark hair before the glass in Mrs. Brett's guest-room. "The man loves me; he trembles at my touch; he is in terror at thought of my being in the slightest peril; his eyes betray his secret when he thinks I'm not looking; but he treats me exactly as he does Robert Floyd; he accords me the courtesy due to a woman and the friendship he'd give a man. I won't have it. I'll have love—and the expression of it. There's no reason we shouldn't wed. He's only a scaler; I'm only a mill owner swamped with mortgage; we're both lumberjacks. Common sense points to a union between us. He shall make love to me! It's my right; before high Heaven, it's my right!"

The following evening the schoolhouse at District Number Four was crowded to the doors. A mild night that hinted of coming green in fields and woods brought out every usual and a few unaccustomed churchgoers. Toward Madeline was shown a new deference. The gossips of the famous quilting bee glanced at one another uneasily. They eagerly listened as her glorious voice rose in the evening hymn. They watched with curious glances when they noted that Mrs. Davitt shared the triple seat with the teacher and India Blair. Again they found a fertile subject of discussion in the fact that the scaler for Steel and Hawley had purchased a handsome driving horse of coal-black. They likewise noted that when he drove from the schoolhouse door, India Blair was seated at his side.

During that ride thru the moonless forest with the woman he adored, the scaler's manner was that of a business friend. Neither word nor tone of voice should reveal the truth. He would guard her from unknown harm and from himself.

"I'm a scoundrel," he thought, "to worship this girl. If there was any hope I'd tell her all and ask her to wait. As it is, I must never let her suspect that I'd give my soul for one kiss, for one embrace from her dear arms. I, the nameless wanderer, may be a fool to play with fire, but I'm not villain enough to make love to a girl I can never marry."

When, at her door he assisted her to alight, her warm breath swept his cheek; her supple form was within his arm an instant—a moment when with wildly throbbing heart he longed to gather her to his breast in a crushing embrace, to possess himself of her sweet lips. Two souls hungered each for the other. This man and woman, both vigorous, filled with abounding vitality, attracted by every element of congeniality, were separated as by bars of steel. The man's standard of action, the woman's heritage of custom placed between them an impassable barrier, a fathomless chasm.

Mrs. Blair looked up from her book as India entered the family parlor. By the light of the big shaded lamp she noted that the girl's face was flushed and that her eyes were aflame, yet her daughter's manner was that of one groping in the dark. She attempted to fathom motives beyond her understanding; she tried to solve a mystery that only the man she had just left could make clear.

CHAPTER XV.

A THAW-WIND roared thru the bare treetops; the earth-soiled snow disappeared as by magic, until only ragged heaps lay in hollows on shaded hillsides; Muskrat Lake boomed and thundered in its attempt to break its heavy ice-cover. At Slabtown the Company's great mill became the scene of activity, as men hastened preparations for the season's mammoth cut; at the slab-built pier the Indian Queen made ready to convey rafts of logs to the empty boom the moment waves danced where blackened ice promised an early break-up. Northward a wooden tramtrack wound sinuously past the Lakeside House from the big mill and its acres of yard to the Company's dock at Lake Michigan near Agache. Long Jim's dinner horn summoned a dozen of the camp crew to their new quarters; many of the lumberjacks waited the movement of ice in Muskrat Lake before the full crew would be employed; a few still remained in camp trucking in the remaining logs of the largest cut ever piled on the Muskrat rollways. Others—Bob Stray among them—used the enforced vacation for a few days' sport.

Armed with a rifle, the lad with the forgotten past started forth in quest of deer; his choice of direction was back of the winter's camp; by chance he trod almost the course Mann had taken the day he became lost and was delivered from his dilemma by the shang hunters. For an hour or more he circled in and out among endless hills and valleys in search of the game not then protected by the arm of law. The mellow spring air induced a feeling of lassitude; he cared little for success in his mission; it was joy to idle on and on over the leaf-covered ground, to revel in the friendly solitude of nature. Frequently he made detours to avoid lingering snow that was cupped in hollows. Whether his line of travel was direct or devious, he cared nothing. It was sufficient to know the rending ice of Muskrat Lake roared in the distance.

A darting woodcock with crimson crest passed him like a bit of flame; near and far the long-drawn musical notes of the phoebe bird came frequently in liquid melody; several times the dull, brown-spotted gray of a partridge rustled low among the underwood; even a couple of orchard-loving blue jays preened their heaven-blue plumage in a bit of open, and once he heard their melodious screech unlike the hoarse call they are accredited by reputation. Later these sounds became hushed; the sky lowered with portending storm; a rabbit cluttered by, disappearing in brush; across a bit of unobstructed forest he glimpsed a sudden flash of dull red, and knew a deer had sped into the deep forest. His gun hung across his arm; he was too astonished at the swift appearance of the game he sought to take aim. Then it was gone, and he stood by a giant hemlock staring.

The next moment he was amazed to note the distant form of a man bending over one of the snow-filled hollows; the day had grown too dark from coming twilight and gray because of storm to distinguish his identity or the color of his garments. Evidently clad in the customary mackinaw and dark trousers, he plied a tool in the act of burying some treasure.

"One of the cattle-stealing gang," thought Bob, and crept low behind his bulwark of tree-trunk.

He had no wish to encounter one of the rural desperados, especially in the act of concealing some object he desired to keep from the knowledge of men. Presently the lone member of the gang appeared satisfied with his work, stood a moment in contemplation of his deed, and then slipped away westward like a shadow.

"I'll see what that is," Bob ruminated. "It won't take long to get at anything he's buried in this root-filled soil, and anyway I'll be at camp in time for supper."

Cautiously taking heed that the owner of the treasure-trove had not changed his mind about leaving, Bob crept among tree-trunks to the spot. With a sharp bit of broken limb that had fallen from a tree he probed and threw back handfuls of recently loosened earth. At last his hand came in contact with a substance that he grasped and tore away until he held it to view. For a moment he gazed at the thing in amazement; the amazement changed to frenzied horror. With an involuntary scream he rose to his feet and bounded homeward.

As he ran the sound of breaking twigs warned him that he was pursued; the lone man in the forest had returned at the sound of Bob's cry of horror. A shot went wild above his head, then the intervening trees caught the flying bullets. On and on the two raced—the pursued for his life; the pursuer for the safety of his hideous secret. Once he gained a few paces while Bob mistakenly rounded the upturned end of a prostrate hemlock. Instantly there came a flash of exploding powder, and a ball plowed its way thru the youth's right shoulder. The shock of near-death gave Bob an added burst of speed. He was unincumbered by rifle, having utterly forgotten it at the moment of his grewsome find. With unerring footfall, impossible under ordinary conditions, he raced with flying leaps.

Before long he reached the slashing back of the camp buildings. Here the greatest care was required in not entering a cul-de-sac of piled brush and becoming a helpless target. An intimate knowledge of the labyrinth of logging roads saved him from this fatal chance, even in the rapidly darkening night. At last, faint from loss of blood, he neared the lighted square of the camp window; the next minute he had burst open the door and fell headlong on the bunk-room floor.

Mann had come from the mill boarding-house to scale extra timber still being delivered by farmers. After finishing the task, even to marking the logs with the Company's stamp, he had partaken of the meal prepared by Haywire Hank, and was settled in his old quarters for the night. Hank, having gained a knowledge of cooking during his bachelor experience, had been induced to fill Long Jim's place while the remaining teamsters, loaders, and rollway men stopped at the almost deserted camp. Therefore Tam O'Shanter was peacefully curled up before the fire, while Watson, Hilliker, Heald, Jim Sprik, and a dozen more lighted pipes and discussed the prodigious cut of the vanishing winter.

"Bob should be back before this," Mann commented uneasily, as the minutes slipped by after the evening meal was finished.

"He wouldn't 'a' gone if he'd known you needed him today at the rollway," Hilliker explained. "But he took a notion for a hunt 'fore the mill starts; perhaps he's had an accident with the gun," commented the big lumberjack.

"That's what I fear," declared Mann; "or that he's lost," he added, apprehensively thinking of his own experience.

But as he spoke the door was jerked wide, and Bob, with eyes fear-distended, fell forward, while his outstretched hand grasped a wisp of rotten cloth that had once been a garment.

Mann and several of the nearest sprang to the aid of the unconscious youth. Heald and the scaler lifted him to a bench, while blood soaked his clothing and slowly dropped to the floor.

"Just as I told you," cried Hilliker. "He's awkwardly shot hisself with the gun. Might 'a' bled to death out in them woods with none the wiser."

"He'll bleed to death now," declared Mann, "unless some one can stop this hemorrhage. Jule, go for Mrs. Brett as fast as you can ride. My horse has rested. Hurry!"

Mann's attempt to remove Bob's mackinaw showed that the right sleeve was blood-soaked and a trail of drops stained the floor, but the clinched hand refused to relinquish his ragged trophy.

"What in thunder was he doing with that?" Watson demanded, as Mann tore the fragment from the stiffened grasp. "And where did he git it?" the teamster asked, eying the section of gray check that had once been the lapel and breast of a man's coat.

"Must 'a' been trying to stop his wound," Jim Sprik commented. After that the group forgot all but the work of first aid to the injured.

Before any one thought possible Jule's voice was heard outside, the door opened, and Madeline, wrapped from head to foot in a gray cloak, entered and advanced in the dim lanternlight to the anxious group.

"It's a shoulder wound," Mann informed her, lifting his head to give the decision. "He lost much blood. If you can stop that I don't imagine there is danger."

With deft, skilled fingers Madeline located the course of the ball which had plowed its way across the upper arm and escaped. Within a few moments the ragged gash had been sponged with proper antiseptic and bandaged with the strips she had thoughtfully provided.

"He's all right now," she told them. "Have him moved to my home; I'll see that he has care while this heals."

She stood erect and glanced about the strange scene. Sitting or standing at the square fireplace were the roughly clad, sun-browned men of the wilderness. Down each wall extended the tiers of bunks; at her feet on benches placed side by side lay the still unconscious youth whose past and present had both become a blank. Beyond him, curiously examining the abandoned rag of twilled check, was Jule, the small, wiry Frenchman. He held it aloft to gain a better view by the light of a lantern that hung from the low rafter. On his dark face was a look of amazement that changed, as Madeline glanced his way, to an expression of consternation. With a quick move he sought to hide the fragment from sight, and his frightened eyes fully encountered Mrs. Brett's.

Before those about her understood the significance of the happening, Madeline caught the bit of decaying cloth from Jule's hand.

"What does this mean?" she cried. In her voice was a shrill note of alarm. "Where did this come from?" she demanded. Her dark eyes strayed wildly from face to face. "Don't you know that belonged to Donald?" she insisted, turning to Mann. "What does this mean?" she again questioned, with her face whitened to marble. "My God! Why don't you speak?"

Instantly the scaler comprehended and cursed his stupidity. Taking the slim, nervous, fluttering hands in firm grasp, he told her to withhold judgment, bade her to hope; but as he sparred for time the woman's instinct completed the thought.

"He is dead," she affirmed in the heartbroken tone of one who hears a death sentence. "Donald was murdered," she said in the half-voice of one thinking aloud, then fell back in the scaler's protecting arms a dead weight.

"This is a bad business," Hilliker declared, with an oath. "We should 'a' known better. Every one o' you'll remember Brett wore that check suit the last day he was in camp. I believe his wife's right; I believe he was murdered, and like blundering fools we've let her be the one to guess the truth. Now, what's to be done?"

"Hilliker and I will care for Mrs. Brett," Mann answered, and his voice was dull with misery. "Watson and Tom Bordon can move Bob to the Brett cottage. Yes," he insisted, when a voice objected. "I tell you she'll need work to keep her from going mad. And Sprik, you take one of the blacks and go for Floyd."

"No, py tam!" cried Jule. "Sprik, he keel my horse! I'll go after heem myself!"

"Just as you like," Mann agreed, without pausing in the task of removing Madeline from the suggestive scene.

Bob Stray had regained his shattered senses, but the scaler told Ben Heald to attend him. A few minutes later Madeline was placed in Sally's care, and a hypodermic of stimulant from her own medicine chest was administered before she roused from that deathlike swoon.

Two hours afterward Floyd's team drove up, the manager alighted, and Mann met him on the porch.

"Tell me all you know and all you suspect," was his greeting, as the two stopped outside where their voices would not disturb the wounded man and the sleeping woman.

"Bob was able to make a clear statement after Jule left; he found Brett's body. He was bringing back the proof of his word when the assassin attempted his life."

"Whom do you suspect?"

"Stimson or Nordyke."

Floyd stared at the speaker in blank amazement.

"Why have you kept this to yourself?"

"I had no means of convincing you," Mann told him. "Even now Bob can prove nothing. The description he gives of this assailant would fit any of a dozen men."

"Will Bob be sufficiently recovered by morning to take us to this spot before the murderer removes all traces of the crime?"

"He'll go if we carry him on a stretcher," declared Mann. "And the work must be finished by dawn."

As the friends discussed the morning's grewsome task, another and quite different heart-to-heart talk was in progress at the Agache boarding-house. The flying figure that had pursued the lad of the forgotten past had sped northwest by short cuts, over the black rotten ice of the lake, along paths and unused roads. With half-running gait he had hastened past the Company's silent mill, down the tramtrack, along the tree-shaded street of the village, and finally stopped at the house patronized by the bookkeeper. With the litheness of a cat he gained the porch roof, then raised the front window of Nordyke's room, and entered. With clammy hands he touched the sleeper on the bed, who awakened, with an oath, and sprang upright.

"D—n you!" he hissed, when he understood. "What devil brings you here?"

"Because," Stimson hissed back, "there's another added to the list, and I must prove an alibi."

"At last!" murmured the bookkeeper.

"Not him," snarled Stimson. "It's that half-witted stamper."

"Of all the infernal fools!" jeered Nordyke.

"Wait! Listen!" ordered his tool. "I went there as you told me to change the corner stakes. When I got that far I was near it. I thought best to make sure that no one should blunder onto the grave. We didn't——"

"Keep the devilish details to yourself," commanded Nordyke.

"I was adding earth and brush just after it clouded up. When I thought there was no danger of——"

"Cut it short," angrily menaced the listener.

"I started back toward the lake. Before I had gone a half-mile I thought best to circle back and make certain there was no witness. Something must 'a' warned me."

"Nonsense!" gibed Nordyke. "It was murderer's curiosity. Go on!"

"No names," warned Stimson. You're in as deep mud as I am in mire. Anyway, I heard a frightened screech, and caught sight of Bob Stray running from that. I started after him, firing every time I had half a chance. I don't know how many times I hit him. He never looked back, but run like a fiend. There was a trail of blood, but after all he reached camp, and I'm here."

"D—n you for a blundering idiot!" hissed Nordyke. "You've played the fool ever since you did for that fellow down the State——"

"Never mind that," cut in the swamper. "I was the fool all right when I let you use that to drive me into more of the same sort. Now you're in as deep as me. And let me tell you this: We'll have to hang together, or we're liable to hang apart."

"Take these quilts and lie on the floor," Nordyke ordered, with no direct answer. He was in the humor to throttle Stimson, but he was likewise able to appreciate the fine points in the bush-monkey's argument. Thus amicably the two settled down for the night.

On the Brett porch Floyd and Mann still conversed in low tones.

"Who is to stand by that poor woman during this awful trial?" Mann said for the third time that eventful night. "She is friendless and among strangers. She needs a strong arm to uphold her, but she is desolate. I fear for her reason when she comes to full realization."

"My friend," Floyd said quietly, "you are indeed blind."

The scaler glanced at the stalwart form, the softened face, the extended hand.

"Yes," said Mann, taking the hand in hearty grip, "I've been blind. I've thought only of myself. God be with you both!"

CHAPTER XVI.

AT DAWN, Bob Stray supported on horseback and attended by a dozen lumberjacks, led the way back over the hills and dales of the forest to the spot where he had first seen the indistinct figure bend at his dreadful task. An April mist sifted coldly down until the workers were soaked, including the wounded man. Every detail concerning that brush-covered, shallow grave was found to be exactly as Bob had stated. But the sight of the place where he had received the shock, his wound, his weakened condition, and the rain combined to make the lad so deathly ill that Floyd and two helpers hastened back with him to the Brett cottage. The others took part in an interment in the country cemetery. The quiet service was conducted by John Hawkins, but his devout, wise, and fearless words need no page of chronicle.

During the day Madeline moved like one in a trance. Nothing but Bob's dire extremity roused her to action. Mrs. Jobbin and Mrs. Davitt lingered in the kitchen offering help. This was accepted by Sally, who waited on her mistress with untiring devotion. Toward night Bob rested for a time, and Madeline was free to allow the full significance of what had passed to flood her mind. Now that she knew Donald Brett had been true to her and to his trust, her heart became flooded with a great tenderness. The months of bitterness wer swept away. She reverted to her earlier memories. Donald Brett stood in her mind for all that was noble. Never in life had she loved and revered him as now that she knew him to have been a martyr. The ice of cold reserve, the struggle to appear unmindful of her loneliness were gone. In their place was the blessed fact that she had never been cast off, had never been a deserted wife. Sally found her weeping; she had the right to grieve openly.

"M' pore lil' lamb, m' baby!" the black woman crooned, but she did not know that Donald Brett's widow had found the first relief of normal sorrow—the first tears shed for him, and not because of pity for herself.

Neighbors vied with one another in offering help. Mrs. Swisher, Mrs. May, and Mrs. Coon invaded the kitchen with every sort of delicacy for the bereaved wife and sick youth. India came and went as her increased business permitted. Then, one morning, Sally opened the door in answer to a timid knock, and on the portal stood Rob Davitt.

"These," he managed to say, with a furious blush that overspread his tanned cheeks, "are for my teacher." In his grimy hand was a cluster of the earliest arbutus blossoms, fragrant, waxlike, and of delicate ros[illegible] but absolutely shorn of leaves.

With a shake of his head he refused to enter, and immediately departed. He had already battled long with his stolid shyness in order to show this mark of respect and love for the woman he had vowed to annoy—to run out of the school in District Number Four.

"Miss Liney," Sally announced, as she duly presented the leafless bunch of delicate flowers, "dat scalawag ob a Rob Davitt done fetched yo' dese yere posies."

Madeline placed the waxlike flowers against her face, and to Sally's distress broke into another flood of unrestrained weeping. The black woman mentally railed at Rob and at herself, but she could not know that the one-time young tough had given Madeline greater comfort than any or all the words of condolence that had reached her in that sick-room where she was passing thru the valley of deepest grief. Rob had walked far to gather the blossoms, since they were only found on the north side of the lake; he had thrust back the boyish shame that dreads to exhibit sentiment, and he had braved the possible jeers of his comrades. The significance of the act showed Madeline a rift of light for the future. She could make her life of value to such as Rob—to the people about her. Tenderly, lovingly she placed the pink blossoms in a glass of water, and their delightful fragrance filled the sun-flooded room.

A chill rain ushered in the Saturday of that week, but during the night frost turned the deluge to a glittering ice storm. Every exposed object glistened in the morning sun in an armor of crystal. The foliage of pines drooped in a cascade of ice. Every leafless branch of tree and shrub supported millions of tiny icicles. Slender willows and poplars swept downward with the weight of glittering ice in an arch of indescribable splendor.

"Hit am jes' like dem walls ob jasper what de Good Book 'scribes," declared Sam, who had been born a poet.

"If de walls of Heaben ain't more durable 'en dem ice shucks, 'taint much use o' goin' dar," jeered Sally, who was nothing if not practical.

Even as she spoke, the morning breeze swayed the curved branches until the tips rattled like castanets. Then, as the sun rose higher and warmed the air, millions of shales loosened and fell with the brilliant scintillation of a shower of gems. Before night the last trace of the wonderful storm was gone.

In time Mann induced the widow of Donald Brett to permit him again to examine the papers of the late manager. No amount of search or inquiry, however, revealed further source of maintenance for the stricken wife. What had become of Brett's surplus salary was a mystery. The purchase of the farm home, his driving team, and household expenses could not account for much of the total. The manager's reticence concerning his affairs left every one, including his wife, absolutely ignorant of any transaction that might have involved large sums. This unchanged condition of her finances gave Madeline no concern. She could teach, and with Sam's farming they would manage. Settlement schools opened for the summer terms the first of May. She believed she would be ready for work when the time came. She even welcomed the thought of active employment.

But the combined efforts of both Floyd and Mann toward discovering Brett's assassin were unavailing. Chance had almost given to Bob Stray full knowledge. But that witness, now rapidly recovering from his wound, was unable to do more than describe generally a man about the height and bulk of the suspect.

"We'll wait and watch," Floyd decided.

"That's what I've been doing," Mann reminded him. "While we wait there's no guessing results."

"We have no other resource than vigilance," declared Floyd. "At least we're now two against two. You should have trusted me with the facts of this deviltry before."

The continuation of this highly interesting story will be found in the Ledger issue of next week. Read it. If you are not a regular subscriber to the Ledger we would like to have your name on our list. The Ledger is only $1.00 per year.

* * *

THE NEW YEAR CALL.

"I'm going to make a New Year call
  Upon a lady sweet and fair,"
My friend and neighbor said to me,
  "And came that you, too, might go there."

"What shall I wear?" I queried back.
  "Put on your best," my neighbor cried;
"Smooth out your brow, brush up your French,
  Perhaps you'll have your knowledge tried."

I wondered, as we walked along
  The wide and stately avenue,
In which of all the mansions grand
  Dwelt this fair friend my neighbor knew.

But, ah! she passed the mansions by,
  And turning down a narrow street,
Up, up four flights of creaking stairs
  She piloted my lagging feet.

She knocked upon a rough pine door,
  We entered at a sweet "Come in,"
Where sat the "lady sweet and fair,"
  Whose native grace all hearts might win.

Her gown was of the plainest stuff,
  Her room showed startling poverty,
And yet no lady in the land
  More fit to grace a court than she.

Full many friends we saw that day,
  And found rare qualities in all;
But none repaid my friend and me
  As did that humble New Year call.
—Mrs. M. A. Kidder.

* * *

Lost News.

"I know that it is in wretched taste to read a newspaper over a person's shoulder," said Beerbohm, "and I know that it is bad policy to stop work and read a newspaper when there is pressing business to attend to. But my experience has been that news in the papers is like time, you must grab it by the forelock or you may not be able to get it at all. It happens time and again.

"Once I read part of an item in a newspaper, and, suddenly remembering business, laid it down. I never was able to find that story again, and I will go to my grave without knowing the rest of it. It is most annoying.

"The other day on the train I saw a man reading a paper which said, 'Great Victory,' in letters half a foot high. I didn't lean over the man's shoulder and read the paper, nor offer any objections when he turned it over before I was ready. I was perfectly calm and made up my mind that I would read that in my own paper when I got home.

"When I got home I turned my journal over and over, but could find no such heading. I borrowed my neighbors' papers, but none of them had any such headings.

"The next day I went to the news stands and bought all the papers I could find for that date. Still I couldn't find the article. Then I bought all the papers of recent issue, and there was no such headline.

"By that time I was desperate. I went to the public library, where they keep every paper in the world. I looked thru all the papers there and there was no such heading. I wish to goodness I could have known what paper that was on the train. The heading went all across the page! I took it for granted that it was the same paper that I take.

"Now I look for that man all the time on the train, so that I can ask him what paper it was that he was reading that day. I can't afford to let news of a great victory get by me."

"You shouldn't have read the headline and then you wouldn't have got into trouble," said Mrs. Beerbohm. "But I also have sinned. Once a lady on a train opened up a paper and spread it out, and I happened to see a funny joke picture. I laughed so loudly that it startled the lady who was reading the paper. She turned and stared at me indignantly. Then I thought that she might think I was laughing at her hat, so I explained and apologized.

"'I was laughing at the joke in your paper,' I said. 'Excuse me.'

"'Huh!' said the lady. 'The next time you laugh over my shoulder I hope you will give notice first. You scared me out of my wits.'"

* * *

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HER PORTABLE HEAVEN

By Elizabeth Mason

"SOME folks ain't got the sense God gave geese!" gloomily stated Rachael Hackett, and shut the oven door with an eloquent bang. "They never knows when they's well off. I'm clean out o' patience," said she, in characteristic speech. "And I don't care if the whole university knows it!"

"What's Jim up to now?" inquired ponderous Mrs. Jessup. She peered over steel-rimmed spectacles at her irate neighbor, whose iron-gray hair was twisted tightly back from a face seamed with lines that indicated frequent laughter.

"Immagrating, that's what!" cried Jim's unwilling wife. "We're all a-going West in a tent wagon. Leaving the whole shebang after we've wrastled with poverty and crucified ourselves into a good home. Here we be fit and fine and fairly setting in a clover patch, when long comes Ace Doolder with them hallelujah stories of cheap land and big crops an' gets Jim all wrought up. He couldn't see nothing but out-West land without stumps, where men ride aboard their plows 'stead o' walking in a honest furrow an' wiping off honest sweat. Ace had him lookin' thru iv'y gates into a sort of alfalfa Kingdom Come. I argued and fit like a house afire; but it didn't do no good. Jim just daggered at me and got more and more sot, like wet-up plaster o' Paris. Arguing with a man that wants to shift is like damming Wilson's Creek with a sieve. He's going anyway. So I'm cooking grub to last the trip. Leastways," she amended, "I'm trying. But no mortal woman and one stove c'n git that far ahead o' six gorgeous appetites. 'Tain't possible!" declared she, and burst into ready laughter.

Mrs. Jessup put out fat hands and lifted small Ruth to her narrow lap. "Going to sell the farm?" she asked.

"It's a trade," explained Rachael. "Ace swaps that section he got on a debt—swaps even. It's four acres o' his'n for one o' ours. Looks like a bargain," she admitted, "even if it is mostly wild land with no buildings to speak of. Wild land out there is grass plains— no brush-burning an' grubbing roots. Ace says so. And he buys our crops and cow and pigs and chickens and the furniture." At the last named Rachael sighed and glanced about the neat rooms. To her the rag carpets and improvised couch, the deal table and home-made cupboards were vastly desirable. "He wants the place for his son, Mike," she explained. "Been hankering after it a right smart spell."

Mrs. Jessup considered this while she watched Gussie, aged 6, and Millie, two years her senior, come in from the orchard with baskets of apples intended for pies.

"Then he'll quit breaking the tenth commandment," she finally commented, "and maybe save his soul; but most of us 'u'd a heap rather he lost it than to lose you. You're going'll be town talk."

"It'll surprise Lib Wilson," gloated Rachael. Her black eyes flashed at thought of the local gossip's amazement. "If I could be at Mis' Huff's quilt tying and hear what Lib says," she declared, "it 'u'd pay me for crying nights!"

The sensation their flitting would cause failed, however, to comfort her; for long after Mrs. Jessup heavily ambled homeward Jim—going barnward—discovered his wife industriously digging up roots in her flower garden and copiously bedewing them with her tears.

"What in Tophet be you doin'?" he demanded.

"I'm a-taking 'long some Heaven," she told him. "Flowers always seems to me like a glimmer o' Glory Land; and I'm going to tote enough rose and piny roots out West for the start o' a new paradise."

Without Lib Wilson—or Jim—suspecting it, "taking Heaven along" was Rachael's dominant trait. Wherever the stork alighted in all that region there was Rachael, arrayed in clean calico, her hair tight and neat, and her plain face a veritable sunburst, to receive the tiny arrival. And it was she who softly stepped across thresholds with the Grim Reaper, weighting down dead eyelids with coppers, cleaning up the litter of mortal sickness, and baking funeral meats while "her betters" condoled with the mourners.

So now, according to her nature, she busily resurrected choice bulbs that blossoms might glimmer in the out-West dooryard. And Jim, assisted by Young Jim, worked quite as industriously at perfecting a make-shift prairie schooner. His mind, ordinarily afflicted with super-content, was now fired by large visions. His mild blue eyes glittered. His gaunt form was tense with hurried effort. Across the big wagon-box he had bent pliant striplings from the woods. And across these was flung the dingy canvas of some sportsman's abandoned tent. It hung in fluttering folds, which were laboriously pleated and nailed, one by one, to the solid frame. The pleats formed a gigantic frill, and their treble thickness added warmth; but the grimy whole appeared much like a famished elephant whose skin sagged on a protruding skeleton.

"Nobody ain't got no kick coming what rides in that," boasted Jim. "It's a regular parlor coach," said he, as his wife joined them to note progress. "And it's the Thru West Limited.!"

"Looks first rate," agreed Rachael.

Her April countenance cleared as she studied details. A camping outfit would hang from the overhead brace. Pictures mights be gummed to the canvas walls. Blankets would drape the two seats by day and become bedding by night. Neatly fixed to the dashboard was a pocket-compass which would direct their way. She found nothing to criticise. "'Tain't so bad," she praised. "It's good enough and might be a heap sight worse."

By dawn of the next day Jim Hackett's compass-guided ark, propelled by the big gray and bay team, was under way. In the back seat, gay with new hair-ribbons and Sabbath dresses, sat Millie and Gussie, while Young Jim, writhing in collar and tie, overflowed the remaining space. Rachael likewise wore her Sunday best of rusty brown and her black hat trimmed with purple flowers. Crocheted lace outlined the collar of her waist. Black lisle thread gloves covered her toil-hardened hands. Her rusty plush coat had been a present from a summer patron for whom she washed. She looked unnatural and prim. The clothes gave her an incongruous setting, like a Mona Lisa in a frame of chipped and tarnished gilt. But no desire for correct appearance troubled Jim. Clad in workday attire, coatless and with suspenders exed across his back, he leaned over his lines and clucked to his beloved horses, or joked small Ruthie, who was wedged between.

"An' him with a suit that fit's like he was greased into 'em," his wife had grumbled to Mrs. Jessup, there to see them off. "But 'tain't no use. The more you talk the less he puts on. I 'spect the Judgment Day'll find him in them same pants an' no coat!"

During the first half-day they drove amid familiar scenes. About them was the russet and flame of late October, while distant hills were dimmed by a purple haze. Then came a never-before traversed region, which seemed like a new world and of intense interest.

"Shore you know the way, Jim?" Rachael questioned.

"We aim due west till we're most there," Jim assured her. "Then we turn a bit south."

"How long'll we be?"

"Mebby two months," said Jim, telling her what she already knew, but her usually buoyant heart sank.

Would they ever arrive? Autumn flowers blazed defiance to winter in front dooryards. Strange dogs barked at them. Unknown people stared at them. Ill-mannered urchins hooted at the uncouth appearance of their wagon-top. Each mile registered a lower degree in Rachael's cooling ardor. Then came sunset; and the children's delight over their ruddy camp-fire and the picnic-like supper brought an answering glow to her tired body. But at night, sardined—feet to feet—with the children in the wagon-box, she thought of the abandoned home. Her fancy lingered in each room until thought was agony. It interrupted slumber and ringed her dark eyes with black shadows. But Jim never noticed. His serene gaze was directed toward the western horizon.

So they journeyed on—sometimes traveling thirty miles, sometimes twenty-five, often but twenty. Farms, villages, forests and streams slipped by in endless review. Twice they were ferried across rivers. Thrice they drove thru the streets of large cities and the curb soon thronged with people gazing—and gibing—at the amazing sight. Each night the harness-chafed horses were picketed on wayside grass, while the sight-surfeited family cocooned themselves in their blankets. By the fourth week they reached a country, sparsely settled, where the wheels cut deep and the heretofore clear skies dripped dismally with autumn rain. Dampness penetrated everywhere — wagon-top, clothing, bedding; and the coughing children fretted at wagon-box restrictions.

"We gotta house them young ones tonight," declared their mother, after a wretched noon lunch eaten under canvas while rain steadily descended. "Ruthie's as white now as the dripping snow," said she. "And Gussie's like to have a spell o' quincy."

"I reckon we better," agreed Jim.

The horses finished eating their noon feed, were put back in traces and the dingy schooner—rightly named considering the element in which it moved—proceeded on its way.

"Keep a weather eye peeled for the right spot," advised Jim. "Some places ain't fit, an' some ain't friendly."

Within the hour they came to a weather-bleached dwelling whose battered chimney emitted a thin column of smoke. At one side were tottering barns; and from one of these emerged a rainbow-shaped man who eyed them while his lean jaws masticated tobacco.

Jim, with head protruding turtle-like from his cover, hailed him.

"Give us a shakedown for the night?" he queried.

"Can't," said the man. "There hain't no beds. I'm a bach."

"Giddap!" said Jim, and the horses slumped on thru mud until the bachelor's unbedded home was miles to the rear. Then a hillside habitation appeared, which seemed to sit back against the hill on its decaying haunches. At the roadside drags had been hauled from a scraggly forest; and now that the rain was abated an individual of the born-tired species labored at them languidly with an ax.

"Got room for travelers?" shouted Jim.

"Nope," answered the wood-splitter. "We're nigh three abed now."

This second rebuff was disheartening.

"'Pears like we ain't wanted nowhere," commented Jim, and clucked his team into a swinging lope.

"Yes, we be," encouraged Rachael. "Everybody's wanted somewheres."

For some beneficent reason her spirits always raised as Jim's lowered. And now, while he despaired, she watched with undiminished hope for a suitable lodging-place. They hesitated at a crossroad, turned to the left, presently forded a swollen brooklet, and soon came in sight of a cottage that promised little space; but fright at Gussie's spasmodic cough sent Rachael, herself, up the neat walk to ask shelter of the inmates. As she reached the porch-covered doorway, the door suddenly flew wide open and a wild-eyed, frantic woman thrust a gasping babe into her swiftly extended arms.

"It's dying!" the young mother shrieked. "My God! what's the matter with it?"

"Croup!" cried Rachael. "Get me turpentine, quick! And alum."

She threw aside her rain-damp hat and coat, and began instant battling for the little life. No longer was she grotesque in unwonted finery. Alert and capable, she ordered hot water, cloths, and drugs. Expertly she worked with swabs and steam and applied heat, while Jim and the forgotten children were taken to the little kitchen by the woman's husband and made comfortable. The horses had been stabled and fed before Rachael won in the conflict with death, and the babe's choking gasps became a scream.

"That's right, sonny," said she, her face shining with joy at the victory. "Holler out the mad, pore little soul! It'll do more good 'en physic. That's nature's lung-fixer, an' it can't be beat."

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"If it hadn't been for you," sobbed the girl-mother, "he'd have died! He was most gone when I see you come up the path like an angel dropped from Heaven; and I believe that Heaven sent you!"

In this astonishing manner the Hacketts found a haven that storm-driven night. But the weather cleared; and by nine of the next day they were again aiming toward sunsets and their distant goal. Mud oozed and sucked beneath the horses' feet. Towns, where they restocked their provisions, were now far apart. Dwellings were widely separated and grew smaller in size, as if the plains lacked enough fertility to grow roomy habitations. Each morning Rachael boiled coffee and fried pork at a camp-fire of twigs or dried weeds. At noon they saved time by omitting the fire and eating a cold lunch. By night the six "gorgeous" appetites were keen for boiled vegetables, secured on the way, and flapjacks cooked to a turn on the big griddle. In time another storm soaked them to dank wretchedness, while Young Jim and the girls rebelled at cramped quarters.

"We sure gotta let them children stretch," declared their mother, when their fretting became a clamor. "And it'll be the next house unless it's a pig-pen or a madhouse.

But, after all, they didn't venture to apply at the next dwelling, since it stood far back, dark and forbidding. Neither did Rachael knock at the one succeeding that, for it was nothing but a shack. Then they drove miles across bleak plains before a settler's cabin crept into the view, drear and desolate, in a weed-grown field.

"Looks lonesome's Noah's dove," observed Rachael. "Anyhow, I'm going in. It's that or nothing."

Valiantly she climbed down from her seat and proceeded up a path sentineled by ripened sunflowers. Two loud-barking dogs rushed from the rear of a dilapidated house and escorted her to the battened door. She knocked and waited. Within she heard a shuffling tread. The door opened. She faced a tall, haggard man whose deep-set eyes lighted at sight of her.

"God be thankit!" he exclaimed.

But Rachael's quick ears had caught the low-pitched monotone of mortal anguish. Pushing past the settler she followed the sound that, in intensity, is like nothing else on earth. It led to a small room at the right. And there she again entered a kingdom all her own, where she stubbornly fought back death. All that drear night she battled for two lives, while Martin Fletcher, the distraught husband, paced the floor of the next room.

"Mon—but—it's awful!" he told Jim, who sat at his fireside while the children slept. "I never thought—it—could be—like that."

Back and forth he paced, hour after hour, until dawn tinged the east; and Rachael, hollow-eyed and spent, came to him and placed his first son in his trembling arms.

"The old gent with the scythe was 'long o' the stork," she whispered. "But we fooled him this time, Mr. Fletcher," said she, her tired face glowing as from some inner light. "You're just happy right, we fooled him this time!"

"Thank God!" the man said hoarsely. "God—and you!"

Over a week elapsed before Rachael dared to desert her patients; and by that time she had the little home shining with cleanliness, had baked a supply of food for themselves and the Fletchers', and was ready for the road. This time the rested horses headed toward the southwest; but their driver's mild blue eyes were shadowed by lurking fear. His voice lacked eagerness, snap. He still talked of large ventures, but his tone lacked conviction. In his unwilling ears sounded his late host's advice and warning.

"Go hoam if there's onywhere a roof to your head," urged Fletcher, "for out yon there's nowt but sand."

This was disquieting; but he drove on and on until they penetrated a region of sagebrush, cactus, and buffalo grass, where cabins were far apart and stunted oak provided fuel.

"Shore you're aiming right, Jim?" his wife anxiously queried.

"Straight's a plumb line," Jim told her.

Questions by the way and his dashboard-compass had given him a tolerably direct course. That had not troubled him. And now they found great tracts, fenced by barbed wire, where myriads of cattle drifted over the sea of scattered grass. "Fletcher reckoned we'd make it by Thanksgiving," said he, and burst into a paroxysm of coughing that shook his lean body.

"Jim, you're going to be sick!" insisted his wife.

"Nope," denied Jim, and coughed until he strangled. "Never felt better," said he, and coughed himself into a limp heap.

"You're a going to up and come down with pneumony!" prophesied his alarmed wife, a day later. "How far's it now?"

"Can't be far," assured Jim, but the lurking fear in his eyes was deepened to something like terror as he gazed over plains where even cattle ranches had disappeared. "Can't be more'n a week's drive," said he, and swayed in his seat with spasmodic coughing.

By this time Rachael was certain Ace Doolden had deceived them; that their ship—or schooner—was wrecked on the sands. Bitter despair welled in her heart and gave utterance to an astonishing prayer.

"Lord," she supplicated, "if Jim's going to be sick, either change his stubborn mind, or make him so's I c'n turn back. Lord, make him see the error of this here way we're going, or have him so's I c'n turn back."

But the weary team, gaunt and ribbed like the wagon-top, steadily moved forward at Jim's command; and he, equally gaunt, coughed and choked and shook with increasing weakness. Then, one morning, he lay quiet in his enveloping blankets and muttered incoherencies. He babbled of new lands, of the old home, of hay-cutting and feeding pigs. He talked with Ace Doolder and Martin Fletcher. His face was fever-flushed. He was indeed down with the dreaded pneumonia, and this brought another prayer to Rachael's lips.

"God forgive me and save my Jim!" was the undercurrent of her thought, while she and young Jim lifted the unconscious man from his hammock under the wagon to the wagon-bed. They were in a desperate plight. About them was an almost uncharted sea of alkali and the last settler's cabin far to the rear. Surely some ranch building ahead must be nearer than that.

"God forgive me and help me save my Jim!" prayed Rachael.

The team was put before the cumbersome load, and strained forward along the faintly marked track, while Rachael's dark eyes eagerly watched for human habitation—and help. At noon the failing horses were picketed on buffalo grass, while the sick man was made comfortable and the children fed from their diminished store. Then they moved on.

"Suppose there ain't any house," mused Rachael.

It seemed to her that they were doomed forever to ride behind failing horses under rotting canvas. Then, when the horses stopped in their tracks, determined to go no farther, a lone dwelling topped the horizon. Once more the team strained at their load. They came to barbed wire where cattle dotted the plain, and passed thru bars into the inclosure. Again they drove thru wide gates into a yard set to locusts and stopped at a porch-shaded door. Rachael knocked, but the only response was a dog's bark, then the sight of a collie's muzzle at a front window. She turned the knob and entered. The collie groveled at her feet, but the house was soundless.

She hastily examined the lower rooms. To her surprise each part of that lone dwelling was luxuriously furnished. Rich carpets, couches, big easy chairs, a victrola, pictures, mirrors were in the different rooms, but not a sign of human life. The collie bounded up the railed stairs with eyes entreating, and she followed him to the second floor. At the landing was a little hallway with big south windows, whose walls were banked with flowering plants— geraniums, fuchsias, begonias. At either wall doors opened into handsomely furnished rooms, but everywhere lay dust, and the whole place—above and below—lacked a housewife's orderly touch. Hastily she examined each room, then opened a closed door at the back. Instantly she learned the reason of that tragic stillness. She saw a bed on which was outlined a dead form; and at the side a woman knelt with arms outspread.

"Pore lamb!" murmured Rachael, and bent over the unconscious woman. "Pore, wore-out, overburdened lamb!"

The scene explained itself. The wife had ministered to her husband unaided until death came; then she had swooned.

"And it might 'a' been my Jim!" thought Jim's devoted wife.

She summoned the two elder children, and the three carried the unknown down the stairs to a couch in the littered parlor. After that Jim was brought from the wagon-box and placed on another wide couch in what was evidently the dining-room, since glazed cupboards held untidy piles of pink-edged delft and a shining table was pushed against the wall. Next the two unconscious ones received needed care. Jim was swathed in thick poultices, made in the model kitchen. The woman was bathed in pungent drugs, and presently her brown eyes opened and gazed fixedly at the kindly face above her.

"There, dearie," crooned Rachael. "You're not alone, poor lamb! We're right here beside you—Ruthie and Gussie and me. And the other two children is tending their pa in the next room."

She thought to occupy the woman's grief-filled mind, besides explaining their uninvited presence, so she softly narrated the story of their terrible pilgrimage and present dire need. The woman listened without comment. Her thin face was tanned to parchment brown, her strong hands were roughened with outdoor life. Presently she spoke.

"He—my husband—died—about noon," she said brokenly. "It was sudden. Maybe—if I could have had—a doctor——"

Silently she considered this phase of the case, then went on.

"It was a judgment," she declared. "We'd no right here. We're what you call squatters. The land belongs to a man who thinks it worthless. He never came but once—twelve years ago. Right then we drove by looking out a claim. And while Ed was tramping about he discovered on this man's section an unsuspected Godsend—a water-hole. It put it in our heads to use our bit of money for cattle, and stock this man's discarded acres. The cattle throve. Ed and I looked after them without help. We made money. We forgot that the owner—or any one the owner sold his land to—might come at any moment and turn us out. Every hoof and this home belongs to whoever holds a title. Out there," said she, indicating the fields, "is a herd that yields nigh two hundred head for market each fall. We drive them north to the railroad and fetch back supplies. Last week we cut out a bunch of fat steers and brought back provisions. That's when Ed took sick——"

Again she had refuge in silence; but when she had forced back the tears she continued.

"We've put by a fortune the way riches looked to us—plenty for a place back home and to live on. Long ago we intended to quit this, but we kept putting the time off—selling just one more bunch of cattle. Like fools we lived in a fool's paradise; and now——"

The thought was never voiced. For an hour she lay thinking and resting. Then she deliberately rose to her feet, possessed of full strength, and her strength was that of a man. Impelled by an inner force—the force of a grim purpose—she passed out to a barn where she harnessed half-broken mustangs to a light wagon. With the touch of a master she drove to the door.

"Help me!" she commanded Rachael. Her imperious will overrode objections, entreaties. The two women brought the rigid form from the room above and placed it on robes in the vehicle.

"We're going back together—Ed and me," she stated. Her voice was steady, her hand never flinched. Tenderly she covered the dead man with sheet and robes. Then she climbed to the seat and caught up the lines.

"Good-by; I won't return," she said.

"But your home—your belongings," reminded Rachael.

"They're yours," said the nester's wife, with emphasis. "For the man who never knew of the water-hole is the one you named. He is Acil Doolder."

As days passed the isolated ranch-house became a place of spotless order; while Young Jim, accompanied by the collie, visited every acre of the range and learned to take the cattle out for fresh grazing and corral them at night. Then came the hour when Jim Hackett opened his mild blue eyes and wonderingly stared at strange surroundings, while the softened strains of a record, played by Millie, floated to his astonished ears. For minutes he lay quiet studying this phenomenon. Then he spoke, and instantly Rachael, her face a sunburst of joy, was at his side.

"Sounds uncommon like Heaven," he whispered.

"You're happy right!" cried she. "Wherever we go seems Heaven!"

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"The power of kings is waning."

"Think so?"

"I know so. I had three of 'em beaten four times last night."

War's Horrors.

"Do you believe in the stories of cruelty in the zone of war?"

"Well, the Scotch Highlanders have their bagpipes with them."

A WAR-TIME NEW YEAR

Not Home for Meals.

"Yes; I have some chickens."

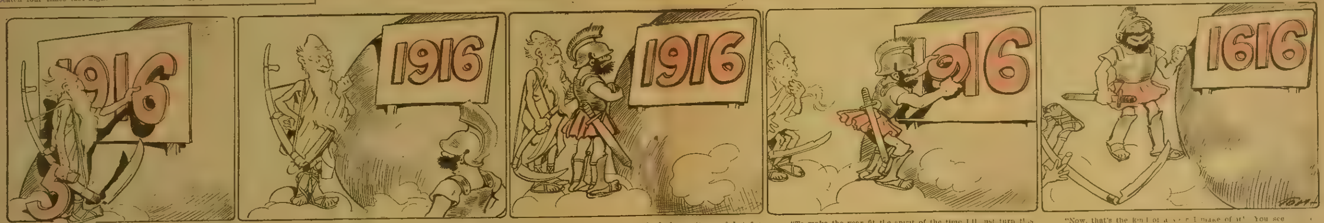
"Isn't their feed expensive?"

"Not to me. They board around with my various neighbors."

Misunderstood.

Ship's Officer—"Oh, there goes eight bells—excuse me, it's my watch below."

Old Lady—"Gracious! Fancy your watch striking as loud as that!"



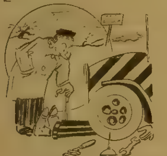
Father Time—"Well, down comes the five and up goes the six; that will fix it up for another year!

"Hello, Mars! Come and take a look at the earth's New Year! We are advancing right along, old top?"

Mars (God of war)—"Well, she looks pretty good but for one thing. The years are going ahead, but civilization is going backward—

"To make the year fit the spirit of the time I'll just turn this figure upside down!

"Now, that's the kind of a year I make of it! You see [illegible] gone back at least three centuries [illegible] business, eh?"



"What's the matter? Having trouble with your car?"

"Not at all. I just crawled in here to play a game of solitaire."

◆

Just in Time.

"Pa, a balloon's just landed in the apple orchard."

"Good! I'll just run down there and get them to pick the apples off that high tree. I've been wondering how I was going to get them."

◆

A Good Guess.

Teacher—"Who was it supported the world upon his shoulders?"

Tommy—"Atlas, ma'am."

Teacher—"Who supported Atlas?"

Tommy—"The book don't say, but I guess his wife did."

GETTING READY.

January now draws nigh,
  Soon 'twill be the fateful first,
When mankind or low or high,
  Poor or rich, the best and worst,
Of their habits must take stock,
  And swear off some petted sin
Some there be in our own flock
  Who scarce know where to begin!

But my problem is, alas!
  Unlike those in vices rich,
I'm the leader of my class,
  And, so far, I've cleared the ditch.
Yet with woe is filled my cup;
  I would do it, if I could,
But I've nothing to give up—
  I am just so awful good!

Yet the youthful minds I lead
  Must see me some vice forego;
My example then they'll heed
  And be spared a world of woe.
But, as I've remarked to you,
  I have not a single vice,
So I will acquire a few—
  Can you think of something nice?

■

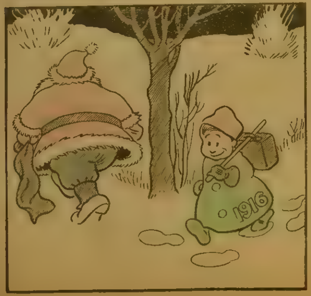
Rheumatism in One Reel.

An old darky appeared in the doctor's office one morning, plainly very low in his mind.

The doctor, recognizing his old patient, greeted him in his most inspiriting manner.

"Well, Elijah, how is the rheumatism these days?"

"Porley, porley, sah!" replied Elijah, dejectedly. "Belieb me, Marse Doctor, I'se jest a movin' picture ob pain!"



Tagging along

Naturally He Was Upset.

On the occasion of a banquet in a small town one of the last guests to leave went to the cloakroom for his coat and hat. He couldn't help noticing the woebegone look on the attendant's face. The poor man appeared worried and sad, and every little while he sighed and muttered to himself.

"You seem upset," remarked the guest, sympathetically.

"I am upset," said the attendant.

"What is the trouble? Haven't the guests tipped you well tonight?"

The attendant answered in an excited voice:

"It's not only, sir, that they haven't tipped me, but they've taken the money that I put in the tray as a decoy."

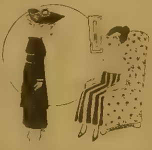
◆

These Ragtime Songs.

"What would you say if a girl called you her little chimpanzee?"

"I would say she was trying to make a monkey of me."

◆



Edith—"Is Mrs. Von Good an entertaining conversationalist?"

Louise—"Perfect dummy! If she can't speak well of a person she says nothing.

◆

Diplomatic Mike.

Hungry Hawkins—"Do yer mean to say ye got a square meal o' dat sour woman?"

Diplomatic Mike—"Sure!"

Hungry Hawkins—"Yer a wonder. How'd yer do it?"

Diplomatic Mike—"When she opened de door I sez: 'Is yer mother at home, miss?'"

◆

Mother Busy Elsewhere.

"My mother made me what I am," said the political speaker as he proudly threw out his chest.

"Well," said a small man at the rear of the hall, "she must have put in most of her time at other things."

The people laughed, but the speaker went on with his oratory.

◆

Of the Same Opinion.

Mildred—"Don't you think Miss Elderly looks much younger in her new hat?"

Helen—"Indeed I do. Why, Mildred, it makes her look but very little older than she says she is."—Judge.

The End of Christmas.

Last Christmas Eve, in a town in Virginia, an old negro had been out celebrating, and, on boarding a car for home, he dropped a quart bottle of gin to the pavement.

Mournfully surveying the fragments, he exclaimed: "Dah! Christmas done come an' gone!"

Appreciation.

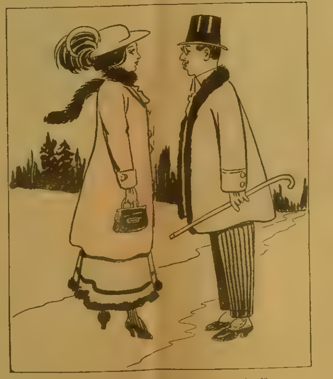
"Has your wife a sense of humor?" [illegible] I told [illegible] the automobile jokes I could, and now she wants one of the automobiles."

A Thoughtful Husband.

Husband (newly married)—"Don't you think, love, if I smoke it would spoil the curtains?"

Wife—"Ah! you are really the most unselfish and thoughtful husband in the world; certainly it would."

Husband—"Well, then, take the curtains down."



Wifey—"Are you going to swear off smoking this year, dear?"

Hubby—"I suppose so. I always have."

Didn't Want It, After All.

Pat Shaughnessy, hearing that the bank in which he kept his savings had failed, rushed around with his bank book and demanded all his money. The paying teller straightway began to count it out.

"Oh, ye've got it, have ye?" said Shaughnessy, with a sigh of relief. "Kape it, then. Oi don't want it as long as ye have it."

◆

Of Course Not.

"Beauty is only skin deep."

"That's enough. You only want to kiss a peachy cheek. You don't want to bite it."

Indeed, Yes.

"They say that golf has been found to be a wonderful cure for insanity."

"Really? But what do they use to cure the golf?"

◆

Hardly Ever.

[illegible]

According to Macaulay.

"Have you any nice, fresh eggs today?" she asked.

"Permit me to state," remarked the grocer, who was also a college graduate, "that all nice eggs are fresh and that all fresh eggs are nice. Of course, I have them today. If I had them yesterday you would not be interested. And tomorrow will take care of itself. Do you care for any nice eggs?"

◆

Admires Continued Stories.

"How devoted your husband is to continued stories!"

"Yes, he even begins the day with a serial."

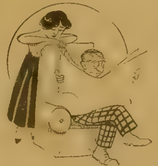
A Long Job.

It is something in these times to get a novel view of the war. Two workmen were discussing it, obviously under the influence of a great deal of unofficial news.

"It'll be an awful long job, Sam," said one.

"It will an' all," replied the other. "You see, these Germans is taking thousands and thousands of Russians prisoners, and the Russians is taking thousands and thousands of Germans prisoners. If it keeps on, all the Russians will be in Germany and all the Germans in Russia. And then they'll start fresh all over again, fighting to get back to their 'omes."

◆



Mrs. Brown—"I often wonder why the Lord took my first husband."

Brown—"Oh, everything went them days."

◆

Too Much.

The cabby regarded the broken-down taxi with a gleam of delight, but did not speak. The chauffeur began operations on his machine. He turned and twisted it, and banged it and screwed it, but to no avail, and still the cabby spoke not. Then the chauffeur wiped his brow, and the cabby, still with the gleam in his eye, crossed over. "'Ere!" he exclaimed grimly, holding out his whip. "'Ere yer are, mister, 'it 'im with this!"

◆

It Wouldn't Hinder Him.

"Want a job, eh?" said the prospective employer to the shrewd-looking applicant for the position as errand boy. "Well, do you know how far the moon is from the earth?"

"No, sir," said the youth, "I don't know. But it ain't close enough to prevent me from running yer errands." He got the job.

◆

No Use Guessing.

Senator Reed of Missouri was asked what he thought Congress would do on a certain pending measure.

"I never make guesses," replied Reed, "about anything that talks. You take a woman, or Congress, or—oh, anything at all that talks, and try to guess what it will do or what it will not do, and the chances are that you will be wrong."

DO IT NOW.

Efficiency we all should seek
And now's the proper time to speak
If next year we would care to see
The rubber plant as the Christmas tree!

■

Giving Him Time.

Whistler and Oscar Wilde did not love each other overmuch, and as they constantly met in London drawing rooms their sparring was pretty continuous.

On one occasion Whistler made a remark so brilliant as to provoke applause even from Wilde.

"By Jove, Whistler," he exclaimed, "I wish I had said that."

"Never mind," replied Whistler, "you will."

■

Merely a Man on Foot.

Stranger—"Did a pedestrian pass here a few minutes ago?"

Granger—"No, sir. I've been right out in this tater patch mor'n a hour, and notter blamed thing has passed 'cept one solitary man, an' he was tramping erlong on foot."

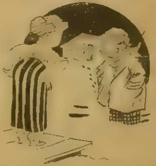
◆

A Doctor's Error.

"That's a smart thing I've done," said the doctor to his assistant.

"What's that, doctor?"

"I have put my signature in the column which is headed 'cause of death' in this death certificate."



The Householder—"Weren't you around here about six months ago?"

The Alms Solicitor—"Can't say, ma'am. Did you miss anything?"

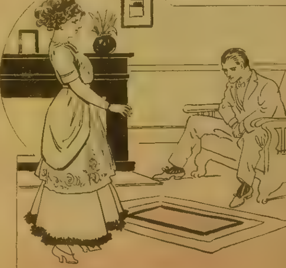
■

Return of the Messenger.

The self-made man stalked into the office of the great financier with whom he had an appointment.

"You probably don't remember me," he began, "but twenty years ago when I was a poor messenger boy you gave me a message to carry."

"Yes, yes!" cried the financier. "Where's the answer?"



She—"I've resolved not to pay any more of my bills."

He—"How's that?"

She—"I'm going to get married and let my husband pay them."

He—"Oh! Going into the hands of a receiver?"

The Munition Maker

A Story of the Tragedy of Choosing Between Love of Family and Fatherland

By Emma Howard Wight

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CHAPTER VI.

OTTO STEIN was killed in his office at the Iron Works. The office boy discovered the murder between five and six o'clock in the afternoon. The manufacturer had been seated at his desk, across which he had fallen when struck. He had been struck with great force on the head with a golf club, which had crushed the skull and produced instant death. The club, stained with blood and with a few hairs clinging to it, was found on the floor beside the desk, where it had evidently been dropped by the murderer.

The coroner's inquest developed facts that pointed strongly to the dead man's son as the murderer. The janitor in the office building testifed that at about four o'clock in the afternoon of the murder Leonard Stein had come into the office building and asked him if Mr. Stein was in his office. Young Mr. Stein was in golfing dress and carried a golf club. He watched him go down the hall and enter his father's office. After twenty minutes or so, young Mr. Stein came out of the office. He seemed very much excited, and went hurriedly out of the building without addressing the janitor.

Upon cross-examination, the witness declared positively that Leonard Stein did not carry the golf club when he left the building. He could not say positively just how long young Mr. Stein was in his father's office, but thought it was from twenty to twenty-five minutes.

The office boy was placed on the witness stand, and testified that he was in the outer office when Leonard Stein came in. He was dressed for golfing and carried a golf club. He asked if any one was with Mr. Stein in his private office. The boy told him no, and he opened the door and went in. After a little while Mr. Stein and his son began to talk loudly as tho they were excited or quarreling. When questioned as to whether he had overheard anything that was said, the boy declared that he had heard Otto Stein say, "I will pay no more debts of yours."

The boy at that moment was summoned by the manager, Mr. Remington, who sent him on an errand. He did not return to the office for about an hour. It was quiet in the private office, and he concluded that young Mr. Stein had gone away. The boy had been about fifteen minutes in the outer office when he heard the telephone ringing in Mr. Stein's private office. It was their call, but no attention was paid to it. The boy came to the conclusion that Mr. Stein was not in the office, and went to answer the telephone. It was then that he discovered the murder and gave the alarm.

The physician, who examined the dead man almost immediately after the murder was discovered, testified that Otto Stein had been struck over the head with a golf club, crushing the skull and producing concussion of the brain. From the force of the blow the supposition was that it was delivered by some one greatly excited.

"Do you mean excited thru rage?" the physician was asked.

"Yes, it could have been the result of rage," was the reply.

Leonard Stein was placed on the witness stand. He was very pale, but kept himself well in hand. He testified that he had gone to his father to ask him for money, and that his father became angry and excited. He admitted that he had also lost his temper.

"Did your father make the remark the office boy claims he overheard: 'I will pay no more debts of yours'?" he was asked.

"Yes, he said that."

"You say you became enraged?"

"I said I became angry. I wouldn't call it being enraged."

"You wanted the money to pay debts?"

"Yes."

"Your father had paid your debts before?"

"Yes."

"He persisted in his refusal to give you the money you asked for on the afternoon of the murder?"

"Yes, he refused to give me the money."

"Was it that which made you angry?"

"That and the manner in which my father talked to me."

"Did you have the golf club in your hand during your interview with your father?"

"No. I had laid it on the desk."

"Where was the golf club when you left the office?"

"On the desk. I forgot all about it. I never thought of it again until the murder was discovered."

"You did not strike your father over the head with it?"

Leonard Stein smiled.

"I did not. My father was alive when I left the office. Some one went into the office after I left and killed him."

"Do you know of any one who would have a motive in killing him?"

"No, I do not."

The janitor was recalled and asked if any one had entered the building during the time after Mr. Leonard Stein left until the murder was discovered. The janitor replied that he had seen no one enter the building.

John Remington was placed on the witness stand, and testified that he had sent Mr. Stein's office boy to the Hotel Wayne for certain papers belonging to Mr. James Howard. Mr. Howard was at the time with him in his office in the foundry. The manager was asked if he knew of any one who would have a motive in taking the life of Mr. Stein.

"No, I do not," he replied emphatically. "As far as I know Mr. Stein had no enemies. I know that all his employes loved and respected him."

The verdict of the coroner's jury was that the deceased came to his death from a blow on the head with a golf club in the hands of a party or parties unknown. But every one present knew that Leonard Stein would be arrested for the murder.

He passed out of the room in which the inquest had been held, seemingly unconscious of the curious glances bent upon him. He was very pale and grave, but there was no indication of guilt in his bearing.

"He surely do carry it off brazen," he heard a man remark, as he stepped into his automobile.

Leonard gave a sigh of relief as the car glided away. Then he collapsed upon the seat, murmuring:

"Oh, God! This is awful!"

He was calm again, however, when he entered the darkened, silent house where his father lay dead. He went at once to his mother's room. Mrs. Stein lay upon her couch, very white and very still. Paula, very pale, but very beautiful in her black gown, which brought out her exquisite coloring, was seated beside her mother holding her hand.

Leonard stopped a moment at the sight of them, then pulled himself together and went up to the couch. His mother looked up at him with wide, strained eyes. She had not shed a tear since she had been told of her husband's tragic death, and those about her had marveled at her self-control.

"Have they discovered who murdered our father, Leonard?" she asked.

"No," he replied. For a moment he hesitated, then continued, "I think it best to prepare you, mother. I am suspected of having killed my father."

A cry came from Paula's lips. Bertha Stein lay perfectly silent, gazing up at her son. He dropped on his knees beside her.

"Mother, you do not believe I killed father?" he cried.

"No!" she replied, smiling. "No!"

"Thank God!" murmured Leonard!

In the library James Howard awaited the coming of Paula. He was walking restlessly up and down the floor. The blinds were drawn, and the room was dim and shadowy. Suddenly, with a murmured exclamation, Howard switched on the electric lights. He turned swiftly as the door opened and Paula entered.

She paused a moment, dazed by the sudden flood of light. Howard stood gazing upon her passionately. Her somber attire brought out her wonderful coloring and the gold of her hair. Her pallor and the pathos of her eyes seemed but to intensify her loveliness. Howard thought he had never seen her so beautiful. He went to meet her, and his arms closed about her. She clung to him sobbing. He kissed her and waited for her to grow calmer.

"It was such a dreadful death," she murmured, shudderingly. "And, oh, to think that Leonard should be suspected of having murdered our father. It is too dreadful!"

His arms fell suddenly from about her; he stepped back, gazing at her in a strange, startled sort of a way.

"What do you mean?" he asked.

"You were not present at the coroner's inquest?"

He shook his head. "No."

She told him what she had learned from her brother. "Leonard says that he will be arrested," she said.

Before Howard could speak, the door opened, and Mason, the butler, entered the room. There was a scared look on his face. He hesitated a moment before he spoke.

"The chief of police and one of his men are here, Miss Paula," he said. "He—he wants to see Mr. Leonard."

Paula turned very white and looked at Howard. "They have come to arrest him," she said.

Howard inclined his head silently. Paula moved mechanically toward the door.

"I must go for him," she murmured. "He is with mother."

Mason held the door open for her. She went out. The butler turned to Howard. He was greatly distressed.

"I just can't believe Mr. Leonard done it, sir," he said. "He give his father a lot of trouble with his wild ways, but he ain't bad enough to go and murder him. Do you think they can bring it against him, sir?" anxiously.

"I can't say," replied Howard, rather mechanically.

He walked to the door, opened it, and went out into the hall. Mason followed him. The chief of police and one of his men were standing near the stairway in the hall. The former glanced questioningly at Mason.

"Miss Paula's gone to tell Mr. Leonard," Mason explained.

Howard moved toward the door leading out into the street. Suddenly he stopped and looked back. Leonard Stein was coming down the stairs. James Howard stood still, watching him. As Leonard reached the hall, the chief of police stepped forward.

"I have a warrant for your arrest, Mr. Stein," he said.

Leonard looked at him calmly.

"Very well," he said.

Howard turned and went out.

CHAPTER VII.

A FEW days after the funeral of Otto Stein a check for three million dollars was paid to his estate by James Howard, on behalf of England, for certain munitions of war. When Leonard Stein was informed of this by his lawyer, Herbert Gaines, he expressed great astonishment, was, in fact, utterly incredulous that his father would furnish war ammunition to England.

"My father was a German, loyal to the heart," he declared. "I cannot

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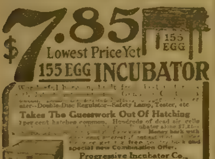

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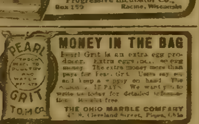

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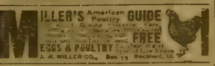

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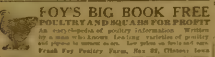

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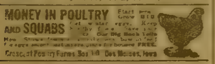

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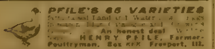

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understand how he could have turned traitor."

"He yielded to force of circumstances, I imagine," said the lawyer. "Your father was financially embarrassed when he consented to fill that war munition order, on the verge of bankruptcy, in fact."

"What?" exclaimed Leonard.

The lawyer gave him a sharp glance. "You didn't know that?"

"I did not," replied Leonard. "I believed my father to be a rich man."

"I am sorry you were not aware of that fact," said the lawyer, gravely. "I am afraid that it may be brought against you at your trial that you killed your father to obtain possession of his money."

"My God!" exclaimed Leonard Stein, his face whitening. The days in prison had told on his nerves. He looked at the lawyer with a shrinking fear in his eyes. "They—they can't bring that crime home to me, can they?"

"I sincerely hope not," replied the lawyer, who was himself undecided as to the guilt or innocence of young Stein. "Tell me what took place between you and your father the afternoon of the murder," he said.

"I went to my father for money," began Leonard. "I was hard pressed. I owed gambling debts, I had borrowed large sums of money, and the notes were about to fall due. I explained all to my father and asked him for the money to pay my debts. I told him I was bitterly tired of the life I was leading, and wanted to turn over a new leaf, lead a better life. But I could not make him believe in me, he was inflexible, relentless. He declared he would pay no more debts of mine. He said if it were not for my mother he would cast me off. He said some very severe things and, at length, I lost my head. I was afraid I might say something that I would afterwards regret, and I rushed out of the office. I forgot all about the golf club which I left lying on the desk. As God is my witness, my father was alive when I left the office!"

"It's unfortunate in that case that no one saw your father alive after you left the office," the lawyer remarked, as he arose.

As the lawyer left the cell, the warden ushered in Gratia Remington. Leonard started up from the cot on which he had been sitting.

"Gratia!" he exclaimed, and stood gazing at her uncertainly.

She went quickly toward him, her eyes tender, compassionate.

"Leonard!"

He drew a deep breath and took her in his arms.

"Gratia, you do not believe me guilty?" he whispered.

"No," she replied, simply.

He kissed her, but for the moment he could not speak.

"God bless you, dear!" he murmured. "If I am cleared of this dreadful charge, I shall spend the rest of my life trying to repay you for your faith in me."

She clung to him, trembling.

"Oh, they can't find you guilty," she cried. "It would be too terrible."

"Does your brother believe me guilty?" asked Leonard.

"I am afraid he does," Gratia admitted, reluctantly.

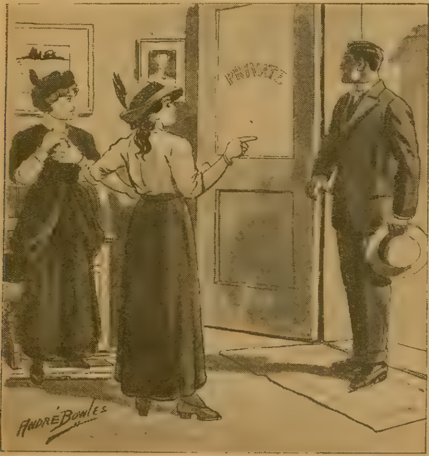
"Well, perhaps he is not to be censured for that," said Leonard, with a sigh. "The circumstantial evidence against me is very strong."

CHAPTER VIII.

A FEW days after the funeral, Paula went to her father's private office and sent for John Remington.

"I want to have a talk with you, John," she said.

"Why didn't you send for me?" he asked. "It must be painful for you to come—here."



"That is the man!"

"Yes, but I could not help coming," she replied. "It is here that the secret of my father's murder is hidden." She glanced about her steadily, with strange calmness. "And that secret must come to light. Leonard's innocence must be established." She paused. He did not speak. She looked at him. "You believe that Leonard is innocent, John?"

He hesitated. He loved her and his heart was torn with pity for her, but he was forced to admit that he did not believe Leonard Stein innocent.

"You see, no one else was in the office," he added.

Paula smiled.

"You may believe that, but I do not," she declared. "There was some one else in this office besides Leonard—the person who killed my father." She paused, then continued, "How that person entered this office unseen by any one, I do not know, but I shall find out. It will kill my mother if Leonard is found guilty, John," she held out her hands to him in passionate appeal, "you will help me to prove Leonard's innocence—even tho you believe him guilty?"

"Yes." He caught her hands passionately in his. "There is nothing I would not do for you, Paula. I love you."

She shrank from him, drawing away her hands.

"Don't, please don't!" she murmured.

"You mean that you do not care for me?"

"I do care for you, John, very much, but not in that way," she replied. She hesitated. "I—love some one else."

The truth flashed upon him.

"You love James Howard?" he murmured.

"Yes."

There was a moment's silence. Remington had grown paler, then he said, quietly: "I am ready to serve you in any way. Tell me how I can help you."

She flashed upon him a quick look of gratitude, soft, almost tender.

"How good you are, John," she said. She thought a moment. "Is there no other way of coming to this office save thru the hall of this building?"

"Yes," he replied. As she looked at him eagerly, almost breathlessly, he shook his head. "Don't build any hope on that fact." He crossed the room and opened a door which Paula had supposed lead into a closet. She was surprised to see that it opened upon the yard.

"But some one could have come in that way," she exclaimed, coming quickly to Remington's side.

He pointed to the foundry across the yard.

"You see that window directly opposite, on a level with this door?"

"Yes."

"That window is in my office, the door of which opens on the other side," he explained. "As you know, Mr. Howard was with me in my office on the afternoon of the murder. We were both seated so as to command a view of this door. I was away from the office about twenty or twenty-five minutes when I sent for Mr. Stein's office boy to have him go to the Hotel Wayne for Mr. Howard." As she looked at him eagerly, questioningly, he added. "But Mr. Howard remained in the office. No one could have come in here without his seeing him."

She turned and stood gazing at the roughly paved space between the door and the window opposite a moment without speaking.

"Some one must have entered by this door," she said, at length.

Remington was silent. After a moment or so, she turned away. Remington closed the door. Again Paula stood gazing intently about the room, as tho seeking some clew to the crime enacted within its walls.

A boy opened the outer door of the office and told Mr. Remington that the foreman wished to see him.

"Mr. Howard is over in your office, sir," he added.

Remington turned to Paula.

"May I see you to your car?" he asked.

"I'll not go just yet," she said.

Remington bowed and went out. Paula moved to her father's desk and stood looking down upon it. On the baize covering, and partly covering the desk blotter, was a dark stain. Paula shuddered.

The door leading into the yard opened suddenly, and James Howard entered. He stopped abruptly and stood motionless, staring at Paula, his face paling. The girl took a step toward him.

"James."

There was something in his face that frightened her.

"What—what is it?" she asked.

He pulled himself together and went to her.

"I was surprised, startled, to find you here," he explained.

"I had to come," she said. "The mystery of my father's murder is here." She glanced about the room with troubled, questioning eyes. "Oh, if I could but fathom it! If these walls, that desk, these chairs could but speak and tell me!"

She stopped with a half-sob.

"Paula," Howard drew her into his arms as he spoke, "marry me and let me take you away from here, from all this—this horror."

"Oh, no!" she cried. "I cannot!"

"I thought you loved me," he said reproachfully.

"I do love you!" she cried, clinging to him. "But I cannot desert my mother and brother in this awful trouble. How can you ask me? how can you expect it, James? It would be too selfish, too cruel."

"I love you! love you!" murmured Howard, crushing her to him. "I am afraid that something may part us."

"What could part us?" she said. "Help me to discover the murderer of my father, to clear my brother. That must be my first thought, my first object in life. When that is accomplished, I can think of myself, of my own

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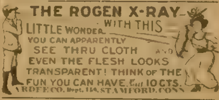

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happiness. But not until then."

For a moment he did not speak. "And what if you never find out?"

She smiled with undaunted eyes.

"My brother is innocent," she said. "God will not let him suffer for the crime of another."

Howard's arms fell from about her; he drew back.

"So you mean to let me go back to England—alone?"

"You are going back to England?"

"Yes, I must go."

"Then I must let you go alone."

CHAPTER IX

ONE afternoon a few days later Paula sat in the library, waiting the coming of James Howard. She looked very sad. Howard was coming to bid her good-by. He was going to New York that night, and would sail in a few days for England. She did not let him know how she longed to yield to his entreaties and go with him, how parting from him wrung her very soul. She had to be strong, and she dared not let him know.

The door opened and Mason, the butler, entered.

"There's a girl in the hall asking to see you, Miss Paula," he said.

"What sort of a girl, Mason?"

"She looks like a working girl, Miss Paula."

"I can't see any one now, Mason. I am expecting Mr. Howard."

Mason stood hesitating.

"I beg your pardon, Miss Paula," he said. "The girl told me to say to you that she had something to tell you in regard to the murder."

Paula arose, pale and startled.

"To tell me something about the murder?" she exclaimed. "Bring her here, Mason."

She was still standing, gazing expectantly at the door, when the butler ushered in a dark, plainly dressed girl, evidently a Jewess. The girl gave a half-compassionate, half-admiring glance at Paula's beautiful pale face as she came forward.

"You don't remember me, Miss Stein?" she said.

Paula shook her head.

"No, I do not."

"I am Rachel Lowenstein," the girl went on to explain. "My brother is employed at the Iron Works. When he was hurt, two years ago, you were very kind to him."

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"I remember," declared Paula. "I remember you now, also." She looked eagerly at the girl. "Is it true that you have something to tell me in regard to my father's murder?"

"Yes."

"Sit down," ~~said~~ Paula.

Rachel Lowenstein was seated, and Paula dropped into a chair, her eyes on the girl's face.

"On the afternoon of the murder, I came to the foundry to see my brother," said Rachel Lowenstein. "It was after Mr. Leonard Stein had left, for he passed me in his automobile on my way to the foundry. I was crossing the yard, when I saw a man go into Mr. Stein's office thru the door opening upon the yard. I didn't take particular notice of him. I went away the next day and didn't come back until yesterday. When I heard about the murder, I remembered what I had seen I came first to tell you about it, miss."

Paula was silent a moment, then she spoke with a searching look at the girl.

"Mr. Howard, an English gentleman who was seated at the window in Mr. Remington's office, claims that no one entered my father's office," she said.

"So I understand," declared Rachel Lowenstein, quietly. "But he is mistaken."

Paula stared at her bewilderingly. The girl had every appearance of speaking the truth.

"Was there any one in the vicinity when you saw the man go into the office?" she asked.

"No, that part of the yard was deserted."

"Would you know that man again?"

Rachel thought a moment.

"Yes," she replied. "He was——" she stopped suddenly. The door opened, and Howard came into the room. Rachel Lowenstein stared at him breathlessly. Then she lifted her finger and pointed at him. "That is the man," she declared.

Howard glanced questioningly from the pale, startled face of the Jewess to Paula's, on whose lips was a half-contemptuous smile.

"Impossible!" said Paula. "You have made a mistake. This gentleman is Mr. Howard, a friend of my father whom I am engaged to marry." She turned to Howard, "Rachel Lowenstein claims that she saw you go into my father's office after Leonard left. Perfectly absurd, isn't it?"

She was looking smilingly at Howard, but the smile died from her lips as she saw his face blanch. A sudden, awful, wondering fear seized her. She stood gazing at Howard.

"It—it isn't true?" she whispered.

"Yes," replied Howard, with strange calmness, "it is true."

Paula steadied herself by resting her hand on the back of a chair. She felt suddenly very weak.

"But you did not murder—my father?"

Again Howard spoke calmly. "Yes, I murdered him."

Rachel Lowenstein cried out, but no sound came from Paula's paling lips. They seemed to form mutely the word, "You?"

"Don't, don't look at me like that, Paula," cried Howard, shrinking from her.

"You murdered my father, and would have let my brother suffer for your crime?" Paula's voice sounded strangely in her own ears.

"I don't know," murmured Howard. "I don't think I would have let him suffer for my crime. I hoped that he would be cleared. If he had not——" he paused, staring straight before him strangely.

"Why—why did you do it?" asked Paula.

He looked at her. He seemed to have forgotten the presence of the Jewess.

"I came here for the purpose of obtaining munitions of war for England," he said. "The victory of my country was the dearest thing in life to me. I had been told that there were large iron works in this town. When I learned that the owner was a German, I concluded that it would be useless to approach him. I had made up my mind to leave town in the morning when I overheard a conversation between two men in the lobby of the hotel. They were talking of your father, and declared that he was on the verge of bankruptcy. I decided to remain.

"I induced your father to agree to furnish me with the war munitions. It was the price I offered that tempted him. It would set him straight financially and leave him a fortune besides. The war munitions were ready for shipment on the afternoon of the murder. I went across from John Remington's office into Mr. Stein's. I went with the intention of telling him of our engagement. Before I had time to do so, he told me that he had changed his mind, and would not furnish me with the munitions of war for England. 'I will not be a traitor,' he said. I saw it would be useless to try to make him change his mind.

"I think I went mad for the time. I felt a frenzied desire to kill the man who was going to thwart me. I glanced about me. On the desk was a golf club. I caught it up and struck Otto Stein with all my strength on the head. He fell forward over the desk. I flung the club from me and bent over him. I saw that I had killed him."

He paused a moment. Paula had covered her face with her hands. Rachel Lowenstein was regarding him with a sort of fascinated horror.

"I grew suddenly calm," continued Howard. "I did not regret what I had done; it was for my country; but I wanted to save myself from the consequences, if possible. I opened the door leading into the yard and looked out. I could see no one. I went back to Remington's office."

Again he paused. Paula uncovered her white, changed face and looked at Howard.

"What do you intend doing now?" she asked.

"Give myself up," he replied, and turned to go out.

She watched him as he moved toward the door. Rachel Lowenstein was gazing at her with a great compassion in her eyes. Paula rose suddenly to her feet and started after Howard.

"James!" in an anguished voice.

He stopped and turned.

"Paula!"

But as he made a movement toward her, she recoiled in sudden horror.

"Go! go!" she cried.

* * * * *

It was two years before John Remington ventured to tell Paula that he loved her. Leonard and Gratia had been married a year. Mrs. Stein was dead. James Howard had taken his own life, given that life, as he believed, for his country. Paula was alone. And one day Remington told her again that he loved her and asked her to become his wife.

She was silent for some little time after he had spoken.

"I fancied that the power to love was dead within me, John," she said, at length. "But, she flushed and looked at him shyly, "I think it will live again."

"I am sure of it," he replied, smiling, as he took her in his arms.

The End.

◆ ◆ ◆

An Excellent Reason.

"Why don't you work for your living?"

"Well," answered Meandering Mike, "it's dis' way. When I eats dis way I gits cold turkey an' mince pie. If I depends on me earning capacity I'm liable to git sinkers an' weak coffee."

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THE Saturday Blade AND Chicago Ledger
900 North Dearborn St., Chicago

THE NEW YEAR.

We are standing on the threshold
[illegible]
We are treading on the borderland
We have never trod before.
Another year is [illegible]
And another year [illegible]
We have passed the darkness of the night
We are in the early morn
We have left the field behind us
O'er which we scatered seed
We pass into the future
Which none of us can read
Then hasten to fresh labor
[illegible] reap and sow
[illegible] New Year [illegible]
[illegible] old year go
[illegible] gather all [illegible]
[illegible] forward in the fight
[illegible] be your motto
[illegible] and for the right

Henry Van Dyke

◆ ◆ ◆

A Tangled Web.

"This is to be a rather large day, Ambrosia," said Mrs. Jefferson, as she helped carry the dishes from the breakfast-room to the kitchen. "Some friends are to be with us next week, and we want to have a general tidying up."

"Yessum, Mis' Jef'son," replied Ambrosia, rolling up a batter cake which Mr. Jefferson had overlooked and stuffing it into her mouth. "Ah wan's off next week, Mis Jef'son."

"Never try to talk with your mouth full Ambrosia; when you have quite finished swallowing your cake I shall be glad to hear what you wish to say."

"No'm, Mis' Jef'son, you won't."

"Won't what?"

"Won't be glad to heah whut Ah's gotter say. Ah wan's off nex' week."

"But what am I going to do, with all those people here and no cook?"

"Ah wan's off."

"But what for?"

"Muh man, he got a mis'ry in 'ees back."

"Your man? Why, Pete is in the penitentiary! And you know I know it!"

"Ah means muh presen' man. Yassum, muh presen' man. Pete an' me done been divo'sted."

"And you have married again?"

"Yassum, dat lil' duck-laigged man whut come to de back doah las' week fo sump'n t'eat."

"That tramp negro! Why, Ambrosia! What is his name?"

"Ah doan' dess 'zactly disremembuh his las' name, but he muh man."

"But why in the world did you marry him?"

"A divo'sted lady ain' got no standin' in 'ciety, Mis' Jef'son. Yo' knows dat."

"But what is the matter with him?"

"Who, Duck? Duck was out huntin' yuthuh night, an' a chicken made a fuss an' Duck git all shot up, yassum."

"Shot up? Why, Ambrosia, do you mean to tell me——"

"Yassum, his back look lak he hab ingrowin' measles."

"But you have had a doctor?"

"Yassum, a young doctuh; but Duck skeered to tell him he git shot, so de young doctuh 'low Duck ain' got nuffin' but smallpox, an'"

"Heavens! Are you sure it is not smallpox?"

"Yassum, Mis' Jef'son. Don' git excited. Ah done pick out some of de shot. But Duck sho did had a mis'ry all night long. Kin Ah hab dat white dress fo' next week, Mis' Jef'son?"

"The white dress? For next week?"

"Yassum. Dat dress makes all de yuthuh cullud ladies at de 'tracted meetin'—ah—uh—yassum, Mis' Jef'son, sugah pie."

"You need not call me 'sugar pie.' I am done with you, Ambrosia! The idea of you telling me all that rigmarole about your husband, and then giving yourself away about the protracted meeting. I have decided not to give you that dress, after all. I shall get a girl to help me out next week, and she shall have the dress."

"Ah, Mis' Jef'son! Ah was dess a-funnin'. Ah isn' gwine nowheahs nex' week. Ah's gwine help you."

"Very well, and you may have the dress at the end of the week."

"Yassum, Mis' Jef'son."

◆ ◆ ◆

Spoiled It All.

A man with an up-to-date fishing outfit emerged from the highway and made straight for a pond once famous for its splendid trout fishing. He wore a contented and expectant smile as he carefully arranged his tackle and adjusted his bait. Then he selected a shady spot on the bank, threw out his line, and patiently awaited results.

After two hours of this a traveler came along and said with the air of one who knows: "Hi, mister, you'll find no fish in that pond."

"What did you tell me for?" queried the other petulantly. "You've spoiled my whole day's fishing."

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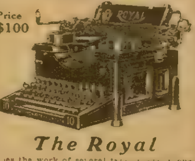

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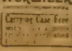

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COPIES WEEKLY.

GENTLE JABS

Happy New Year!

Leap Year at last, girls

Here is where 1916 arrives and digs itself in.

It's a poor resolution that will not hold water.

There are plenty of new leaves to be turned over.

Give the old year credit for planning to quit on time.

Some men think a luxurious stand of whiskers adds to their dignity.

A man who is continually harping on his virtue has at least one vice.

As long as a young man can't tell the color of a girl's eyes he is safe.

Get ready to swear off any bad habits you may happen to have about you.

One excellent and harmless way of welcoming the new year is to practice writing "1916."

All men are more or less prejudiced—not because they want to be, but because they can't help it.

Some thin people hold that a well-filled stocking, even with no Chrstmas presents in it, would be a boon.

Never twit your wife because of her foolish ideas. Except for one of them she would never have married you.

"Like father, like son," says the old saw. But a girl may like the son without having any use for the old gentleman

Hard work never kills a man. But scheming how he may be able to put in the most time on a short job saps up his vital energy

Some people are afraid to keep a diary because of the fool actions they know they will commit during the year. Others write the facts down regardless

Everybody should so live that he will not need to become intoxicated in order to celebrate fittingly twelve months hence the dying of the present bright young year.

On the first day of the glad New Year a goodly crowd of men will get busy and assist in preparing those famous pavements made of good intentions. This is a good work.

As time goes by the American people will realize more and more fully that they ought to have a feeling of deep thankfulness for a great many [illegible] things that might have befallen them in 1915 and did not!

Home and Health

LUCKY AND UNLUCKY DAYS.

Here is an old verse which our mothers and our grandmothers and our great-grandmothers believed in.

It warns us that we marry on

Monday for health, Tuesday for wealth,
Wednesday the best of all;
Thursday for losses, Friday for crosses,
And Saturday for no luck at all.

Custom has set aside 32 days of the year as unlucky for marriage, tho according to masculine testimony, there are 365 of them in each year, except in leap year, when there is one more. But the days of which tradition bids you beware are:

Jan. 1, 2, 4, 7, 10, and 15: Feb. 6, 7, and 8;

March 1, 6, and 8; April 6 and 11;

May 5, 6, and 7; June 7 and 15; July 5 and 19; Aug. 11 and 19; Sept. 6 and 7; Oct. 6; Nov. 15 and 16, and Dec. 15, 16, and 17.

Aside from the time of the year and the day of the week and month, it seems that your wedding garments influence your future career in some mysterious way, for does not the rhyme tell us that:

Married in brown, you will live out of town.
Married in gray, you will go far away.
Married in black, you will wish yourself back.
Married in red, you will wish yourself dead.
Married in pearl, you will live in a whirl.
Married in green, ashamed to be seen.
Married in yellow, ashamed of your fellow.
Married in blue, he will always be kind and true.
Married in pink, your spirits will sink.
Married in white, you have chosen aright.

❧

FASHION NOTES.

Stocks with jabots continue to be worn.

Even velvet suits nowadays are braid bound.

Colored cord piping is charming on checked wool.

A smart waist is of heavy blue or black net over white chiffon.

A few bustle effects have appeared, but it is not probable that they will be in favor.

Even the short-haired furs this year are finished with heads and tails to give an animal effect.

A pretty velvet and plaid taffeta dress has a hip length coat of the velvet with double belt close under the arms.

Hat trimmings are often flatly applied, sometimes almost appliqued, unless in the use of wings, perky bows and coque pompons.

All evening gowns this season have from two to five full length skirts. The foundation may be of soft, thin satin, over which may hang skirts of net, chiffon or the popular metal cloth, either in gold or silver. Five skirts, however, do not make very much weight in the gown in fabrics of this sort.

❧

RECIPES.

CREAMED HAM—Melt 1½ tablespoons butter and stir in 1½ tablespoons flour and blend together, then add slowly 1½ cups of sweet milk and stir until smooth. Season with a little pepper and add 1 cup of ham chopped fine and 4 tablespoons grated cheese. Stir until the cheese is melted and serve it spread on slices of toasted bread.

BAKED POTATOES WITH CHEESE—Take required number of medium-sized potatoes, scrub them clean. Cut them in halves, spread each half with a little butter, a sprinkle of salt and pepper and lay a thin slice of cheese on top Place on a slightly greased pan and bake in a hot oven until soft and brown.

SQUASH PIE One and one-quarter cups steamed and strained squash, ¼ cup sugar, ½ teaspoon salt, ¼ teaspoon cinnamon or nutmeg or ½ teaspoon lemon extract, 1 egg, ⅞ cup milk. Mix sugar, salt, and spice or extract, add squash, egg slightly beaten, and milk gradually. Bake in one crust. If a richer pie is desired, use 1 cup squash, ½ cup each of milk and cream and an additional egg yolk.

MOLASSES CANDY—Two cups best New Orleans molasses, 1 cup butter, 1 cup white sugar. Mix all together and boil until it hardens in cold water. Turn out in buttered plates and when cool enough pull until light. Cut in pieces with the shears. This is creamy and can be eaten with gloves on and will not stick.

❧

FOR THE HOUSEWIFE.

If the piano keys grow yellow, clean them with a soft cloth dampened with alcohol. This restores them to their usual color.

To mend large holes in knees and heels of stockings, baste on wrong side of them a patch of netting the color of the stocking. Then turn and darn on the right side; you will not only save much cotton, but you do it more quickly and have a neater looking darn.

All mattresses used either by children or adults should be brushed and beaten once a fortnight. Put in the sun by open windows when possible. In this way the white dust which comes from the body is not allowed to lie on the creases of the mattress covers. A good rule is to have mattresses brushed regularly one day in each week.

A yellow bedroom is charming because it suggests sunshine and radiates good cheer. On the walls use a creamy yellow paper, either striped or plain, and at the windows use curtains of white swiss with inside drapes of plain yellow, having a border of figured yellow cretonne. For the floor covering, if a yellor rag rug is too light for practical purposes, use a dull green or brown one that has a border of flowers and leaves.

❧

HEALTH NOTES

The best training in the world cannot turn a woman who has not the gift for nursing into a tactful nurse. Efficient and dependable she may be trained to be, but tact and sympathy must come by insight. However, there are certain rules and certain niceties that any one trained or untrained can and should remember when they are in the sickroom.

Be careful that you have no annoying little tricks such as clearing your throat, humming, rocking, drumming with your fingers, or making any unnecessary noise that might be irritating to tired nerves. As most people who have such tricks are quite unconscious of them themselves, it is quite necessary to stop and think occasionally to be sure that you are guilty of none of them.

Another habit most annoying to patients is one that many nurses have of talking to other people, the doctor or family, in an undertone or whisper within hearing of the patient. This is as unnecessary and discourteous to an ill person as it is to a well person, and to many patients it is alarming as well. If you have anything to say that cannot be said in the hearing of the patient, go out of the room to say it.

A still more necessary point to remember is that the most exquisite neatness must be the order of the sick room. The slightest disorder is often intolerable to a nervous patient. Remember that all that the patient would wish to have done in her room you must do for her, otherwise she will worry about it. If she is an habitual person, and accustomed to have her furniture and personal belongings just so, it will fret and worry her to have them misplaced. Do not leave the medicine bottles, bandages or any paraphernalia of the sickroom in sight They are depressing as well as ugly.

Do not insist upon straightening the bedclothes if your patient wishes to be let alone. Do not insist on anything that is unnecessary in the way of attentions to regulations. Above all, hold it always in your mind that you must study and consider your patient's personality and subdue your own. Do not thoughtlessly impose your will and habits upon the helpless, nervous invalid.

❧

NEIGHBORLINESS.

Be interested in your neighbor, but not curious.

"Good morning" or "good evening," is easily said and does not take much of your time.

Borrow not and then you may not be asked to lend.

Respect your neighbor's line full of clean clothes, and do not select her wash day for the beating of your rugs.

It is said walls have ears, therefore speak low if you would keep your affairs private.

Don't consider your neighbor's house a stopping-in place, to enter without knocking.

Don't start a quarrel over your neighbor's children, but preserve friendliness.

Always be ready to help your neighbor in time of need, but don't intrude.

Make your little girl use the soft pedal when practicing, if there be sickness in your neighbor's house.

Neighborliness should be nothing more than a steady courtesy.

❧ ❧ ❧

Adam had his troubles, but he missed the dressmaking and millinery bills.

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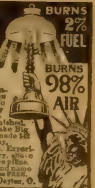

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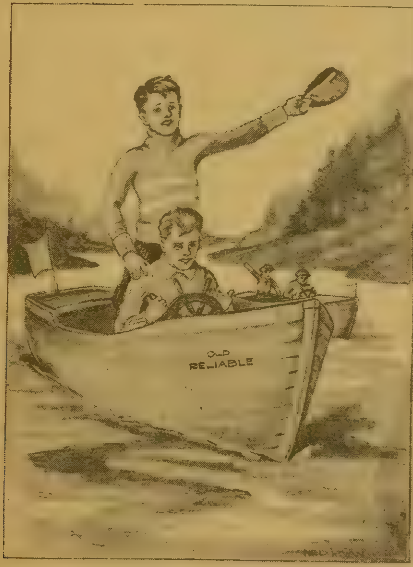

"Yes, we're out of the Dismal Swamp all right."

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CHAPTER IX.

THE three boys hurried as fast as the uneven nature of the solid ground permitted; and even then once Bob slipped, and got his foot in the shallow water that covered the mud bed, going down no one could say how deep; but he managed to clutch hold of a root in time to save himself.

Perk was in the lead, and Red brought up the rear; not because as a rule he was apt to lag, but on this occasion he had heeded Bob's note of warning, and tarried long enough to jump over to where his gun rested against a tree. If so be it should turn out to be a bear that had given Dumpling a scare, Red wanted to be ready to do something besides shout.

There was not any trouble about knowing where to head, for Dumpling kept on with his wild shouts and appeals to them to "hurry, for goodness' sake, or you'll be too late!" Of course that spurred the others on to do their best, and presently they managed to break thru a line of brush, so that they were able to see what was the matter.

"Why, it ain't a bear!" Red was heard to say, partly in disgust. "The silly fellow's only stepped off the land, and is stuck in the mud, that's all!"

"All!" shrieked Dumpling, whose round face had lost pretty much its customary red color, and looked peaked and white with alarm. "If you felt how this same mud grips your legs, and how you keep on a-sinkin' further and further the more you try to lift one leg after the other, you wouldn't say that. All? Why, ain't you never heard o' fellers that's been sucked down in quicksands and muck-holes till they just squashed under? All? Guess that's enough to make the bravest turn pale, and yell for help. Why, if there was a thousand pounds glued to each foot they couldn't feel heavier. Perk, how'm I a-goin' to get out of this?"

"Don't worry, Dumpling," said the other, consolingly; "we'll see that you do get out, somehow or other. But you're right about the danger of the thing. If you had been further away from the boats, or we happened to be sound asleep, so that we never heard you shout, why, chances are you might have been sucked down in time."

"You listen to that, Red Ketcham," cried the indignant Dumpling; "and don't ever make fun of a poor wretch that's gone and got caught like me. Oh! ain't I glad you happened to be awake! Whatever would I've done to save myself?"

"Well," said Perk, "there are some ways that a fellow can use to help himself in case he gets stuck in the mud like you are, or caught in a quicksand hole. A heap depends on him keeping his wits about him. If he gets rattled, and tries to lift first one foot and then the other, he's bound to only go down deeper and deeper, and unless help comes in time it's all over with him. The best way to do is to roll right over, and present as broad a surface to the mud as he can. Then he might manage to pull his feet out, and perhaps splash to the shore before he sinks again."

"Ugh! Think of me rollin' thru all that soft mud, would you?" cried Dumpling, quite aghast at the idea.

"There's another way, if a tree chances to be growing over you, as it is here," continued Perk. "And in this case it looks like Dumpling might be in great luck. All he has to do is to stretch up his hands and take a grip on the fine limb that happens to be in reach. Then drag upwards till you get your feet free. After that either climb up on the limb, or use it to work ashore. We'll give you a hand if you ain't able to make the riffle."

"That sounds good to me, Perk!" exclaimed Dumpling, enthusiastically, as he immediately stretched his arms above his head; it was something of a strain for him to clutch the bough, but he managed to do so finally; and then the others saw him throw all his strength into an effort to drag himself out.

The stout limb swayed and bent, until Dumpling was able to get his arm over it; but all the time he was working his imprisoned feet freer from the clinging mud. In less than a minute Dumpling had progressed far enough to be able to hunch himself along the limb a few inches.

"I'm a-comin', all right, Perk; what you said was true, every word of it. And I'm a-goin' to get out of my own self, without Red or anybody lendin' me a heplin' hand." Which he did in a short time, bringing up on the solid ground, almost breathless, looking pretty forlorn, but triumphant in that he had been allowed to accomplish his own salvation.

"Sometimes even these things fail to work," Perk went on to say, "and the best way is not to take any chances when you're off by yourself in a swamp or marsh. I reckon a man must suffer a thousand deaths when he begins to feel he's going down, an inch at a time, and nothing can save him."

"Well, you are a fine sight now, Dumpling!" chuckled Red, as he surveyed the mud-daubed trousers of the fat boy.

"That's all right," Dumpling assured him. "I c'n stand the mud, if only I know I'm safe again. Gee! that gave me a queer feeling, I tell you, boys, when I first got wise to the fact that the worse I tried to draw out, the deeper I went in."

"Makes me think of the man who was telling about the obstinate mule he was riding, that backed two steps for every one he took ahead; and when they asked him however he got to where he was going, he said that he just headed the other way, and the contrary animal backed him there. Think where you'd 'a' brought up, Dumpling, away over in China. It ain't many fellows that could get to the other side of the world without a long sea voyage, eh?" Thus spoke Red.

Dumpling was so happy over his narrow escape that he did not feel like showing any ill feeling, no matter how Red "joshed" him. He had already picked up a stick, and commenced to wipe some of the surplus mud off his legs.

"Guess one of you other fellers'll have to look after breakfast this morning," he went on to say, composedly, as he labored; "seems like I'll have my hands full cleanin' up some. My legs feel like they weigh a ton apiece."

"That's partly because you strained so hard trying to pull them up," explained Perk; "and don't be surprised if they feel a bit sore for a day or two. I reckon you must have been just wild, and tugged like a steer, while you yelled for us to come over into Macedonia and help. But however did you manage to get in there, I'd like to know?"

Dumpling looked up sweetly, and smiled. "You're to blame for that, Perk, sure you are!" he said.

"Well, I like your nerve! Just hear him say that, would you, when Perk was all of a hundred yards away at the time and with us! Thinks you sneaked up on him, and just shoved him in, Perk, that's what!" Bob exclaimed.

"No, he's got some other reason for saying it," Perk declared; "and I think I c'n give a guess what it is. Had your nose close to the ground, didn't you, Dumpling, following tracks; and didn't notice where you were headng till you stumbled, and just stepped off the bank?"

Dumpling nodded his head, and looked rather sheepish.

"Why, you see," he started to say, "I came up on some sort of little animal that jumped out of a clump of bushes; I thought I could grab it, so I made a lunge; but say, it turned just

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like that, and slipped past me. My foot caught on one of them plagued roots, and first thing I knew I landed feet first in there."

"Well, of all the great luck I ever heard, that takes the cake!" declared Red, pretending to look astounded.

"Good luck!" echoed Dumpling, stopping in his scraping operations long enough to turn his puzzled face toward the speaker.

"Sure," continued Red, with a grin, "because any other fellow'd just gone in head first; and see what would have happened then! But Perk, think of the nerve of Dumpling a-tryin' to capture an unknown little beast right with his bare hands."

"Why, would he 'a' bit me, d'ye think?" the other wanted to know.

"Bit you!" repeated Red, scornfully. "Why, you greenhorn, that might have been a skunk; and then you would have been in trouble. Why, we'd have had to bury your clothes, and made you go without anything but a blanket around you the rest of the time. Perk, tell him he wants to fight shy of any cute little animal he runs up against, and which he just don't happen to 'a' been introduced to. It's a dangerous habit, my boy. Oh! yes, I've been there, I admit; and that's why 'once bit, twice shy,' for me."

Perk immediately looked around, as tho bent on finding the tracks of the animal Dumpling had mentioned.

"Just over there, Perk, was where he ran, the last I saw of him. He squeaked when I fell over into the mud, and I even think he thought it a fine joke," Dumpling told him.

Pretty soon Perk was down on his hands and knees, examining the marks. In places they were very plain, so that he had no hesitation in deciding the nature of the animal that had run before the eager Dumpling, whose mind at the time was so filled with ambition to learn some of those wonderful swamp secrets, that he did not look what was before him, and consequently met with trouble.

"It was a mink, after all!" Perk announced.

"But it might just as easy been a polecat!" Red declared; "and anyway, Dumpling had better look twice after this before he grabs up any critter that runs across his path."

"I will," decided the other, firmly, as tho he felt that he had received another valuable lesson that was going to make him wiser, and a better woodsman.

"Well, let's get back to the boat then; and I'll take care of breakfast this morning," said Perk.

Evidently Dumpling did not want to be left alone there, for he stopped his cleaning labors long enough to trot at their heels. Red even had the cruelty to ask what his hurry was; and if he had any fear that the mink would jump out of the bushes to bite him, or else push him into the mud again; but Dumpling only snickered, for he was too grateful over his recent narrow escape to harbor any ill feeling toward his chums.

So they took up the ordinary round of duties again. Perk prepared a bountiful breakfast, and Dumpling was pleased to see that as yet there was no indication of the party being put on half rations; which was possibly the thing he dreaded worst of all about being lost in Dismal Swamp.

He had finally managed to scrape off most of the mud, and what was left Perk told him could be brushed away, once it had a chance to dry. And as Dumpling sat there, munching his food, his mind seemed to be dwelling on the great cause for gratitude which he had; because once during a temporary lull in the lively conversation he broke out with:

"Anyway, I'm glad I had that little experience. Yes, you c'n laugh as much as you've a mind to, Red, but think how valuable it'd be in case I ever got stuck in a quagmire again, when there wasn't anybody within the sound of my yells! Perk, seems to me every boy ought to know about what you told me; and I'm sure a-goin' to pass the same around when I get back home. No tellin' what good it might do to some poor feller. Excuse me from bein' sucked down in a mud-hole; anything but that!"

CHAPTER X.

"HERE'S two more long days crept past!" Bob Ketcham was saying, as he stepped ashore to fasten the painter of the boat to a bush, while they ate their lunch.

"And not a foot nearer to the Garraway than we were three days ago, either!" Red added, disconsolately.

"Still we're all here, as yet, safe and sound," Perk told them, while he also jumped ashore, his hands full of stuff to be used in making their noon meal.

"And with two narrow escapes to the record; that of Dumpling in the sink-hole, and Bob here trying to ride bareback on a bear!" Red went on to say.

"The last was the most exciting thing ever," Dumpling admitted, "and you ain't had the goodness to just explain how it all came about, Bob."

"Well, I was too much stunned myself about that time yesterday noon to want to talk about my adventure," admitted Bob; "but now that a little time has passed by, and I'm feeling better, I don't mind explainin' the same."

"That's decent in you, Bob," Dumpling told him; "you know I went into details head over heels after I'd had my trouble."

"Just like you might have gone into the mud, if you hadn't been born lucky, which I'm told is better than to be born rich, like me," Red remarked, laughingly.

"Why, you see," Bob began, while they busied themselves in starting a fire, and such things as went with having a warm meal, "I never dreamed of such a thing as a black bear snoozing in that bunch of brush when I started to walk thru the same. Perk, here, was getting ready to take a picture, and asked me to pose, so everybody'd know we'd been along with him when he snapped her off. And then all of a sudden, as they say in the stories, my feet seemed to slip from under me, and I found myself falling on my nose. I just threw out my hands, gripped the first old thing that came along; and most before I knew, I was a-boomin' along, spraddled on the back of that scared bear."

"And," interrupted Perk, "let me tell you, I saw my golden chance, for a hummer of a picture, and I snapped them off just as they were shooting thru that open place beyond, where the sun shone. I haven't developed the film yet, but when I do, I reckon it'll turn out to be the greatest thing that ever was. We'll get an enlargement, twelve by twenty, and have it framed to prove the story; because boys would laugh at us for telling it unless we could back our words up."

"But however did you manage to say good-by to the old chap, Bob?" Dumpling wanted to know. "You had the advantage of me, because I couldn't break away, no matter how much I wanted to do it; while all you had to do was to let go, and take chances of getting scratched in a bramble bush."

"D'ye know that didn't occur to me," Bob admitted frankly, with a huge grin, as if the joke rather appealed to him, now that it was an old story. "Seemed like all I could think of was a sort of crazy desire to hang on, tooth and nail. And nobody knows how far that bear might have taken me, only for a low limb of a tree that scooped me off'n his back; like Absalom was ketched, only it wasn't my hair that did the business. I was left hangin' on that limb, with every breath knocked out of my body; but when I heard the crowd a-runnin' up, I managed to wriggle loose, and drop to the ground; because I didn't feel like bein' caught that way."

All of them laughed heartily at the quaint way Bob had told his story; and the idea of him being left hanging in that wayward branch of a tree would no doubt cause a smile, every time it came into their minds.

"Yes, and d'ye remember what was the very first thing he said when we

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came up to where he was laying there?" asked Dumpling. "'Oh, tell me, fellers, is my hair all turned white?'"

"Well, I guess it might have been, after such a scare," retorted Bob; "if you don't think so, Dumpling, then all I hope is that some fine day you may have just such a ride yourself. It was rapid action, all right. I hadn't any time for thinkin', or yelling like you did, but could just hang on, and hold my breath. Then—smash—that limb caught me; and it was all over!" and he rubbed his head tenderly, as tho there might be a bump or two under his thick hair.

The two days that had elapsed since Dumpling met with his adventure in the mud had been made up of constant endeavors and many disappointments. The motor boat boys had exhausted every device they could think of, trying to follow misleading channels that would all too soon suddenly come to an end, and leave them worse off than ever.

Again and again had they been forced to turn back; and sometimes even this proved to be an impossible feat, as they could not tell where they had come. And so they had gone on resolutely, trying to get somewhere, but never having any reason to feel that success was coming.

Several times they thought things looked familiar, and it was decided that they had passed along there at some other time; but just when, and headed in which direction was a question that even smart Perk confessed himself unable to answer.

When one has been floundering around in a swamp for three or four days, all sense of location seems to vanish. Of course, with the aid of a friendly compass, or by taking note of the sun's rising and setting, it is possible to make sure of the points of the compass; but this amounts to but little when you want to head into the south, and all navigable channels seem to be looking in other directions.

They had kept up their courage in what might be called a remarkable way. There was Dumpling, who had once been so timid, and ready to shrink when trouble loomed up ahead—he kept the word he had given on that previous occasion, and continued to laugh and joke even when Red and Bob murmured, and complained of the everlasting monotony, or which they were so heartily tired.

All of them had carefully refrained from taking even a sip of the swamp water, except when it had first been boiled, and then allowed to cool. This would prove that Bob's promise to his mother was bearing fruit; and at least none of the four boys would have reason to feel sorry, on account of any germ being planted in their systems. As Perk said, nothing might happen, even if they drank large quantities of the water; but it was best to be on the safe side every time. That was why, as he told them, wise people insured their homes and factories; they never expected to have them take fire; but if they did, what a comfort it was to know the money loss would fall on other shoulders.

During this last morning it was plain to the others that Perk was beginning to be annoyed with himself. He frowned a good deal, as he had a habit of doing whenever he was trying to solve some tough problem. Among themselves Red, Bob, and Dumpling had expressed the opinion that Perk was getting ready to do something along new lines. And of course they were anxiously waiting for him to make an announcement to that effect.

The lunch was soon dispatched, for somehow they did not seem to be quite so ferociously hungry as usual; perhaps it was because of the rapidly diminishing stores; or it might be the effect of their constant gloomy surroundings was beginning to dull their appetites more or less.

Perk did not immediately get up and say that they had better be moving; what was the need of hurrying when they could only poke the noses of their boats into mud banks, and back off again, getting nowhere in particular, and finding only new difficulties wherever they went?

"I've been kind of thinking this whole thing over," Perk began slowly, at last.

"Yes, that so?" remarked Bob encouragingly; while all of them sat up, and began to show new interest.

"And I've come to the conclusion that up to now we've been working on the wrong principle," Perk went on to say.

"Do you mean that it's high time we owned up to being beaten, and started back with our tails between our legs—that is, I mean like dogs that've been licked?" Red wanted to know; and somehow there was a vein in his speech that seemed to admit he would not much mind if Perk confessed to being ready to back out.

"No, that isn't what I mean," the other declared, positively; "and I'm just as dead set on getting to the Garraway as I ever was; only I think my plan of hunting for an opening that pointed due south was wrong. It made me think of a picture I saw the other day of Hampton Court Maze, over in England. You know they grow evergreens in squares, and the puzzle is to get into the center, because all the passages that seem most inviting have bars across the same. I figured out the answer, after I'd looked it over careful-like, and what d'ye think it was, boys?"

"Give it up!" Red replied quickly; and the other two echoed his words, for they were too anxious to hear what Perk had to say to bother trying to guess.

"The secret of success was in keeping as near the outside edge as you could, in the beginning, until finally you opened up the only right way in," Perk told them; "and in our case, why, we had ought to pick out the most promising channel that leads away into the east or west."

"Oh! sort of turning the mule backwards, like in that yarn I told you about?" said Red, quickly; "but say, Perk, mebbe there's something in what you're telling us."

"I think there's a whole lot," added Bob; who, if he seldom had an original idea of his own, could readily fall in with those advanced by others.

"So do I," echoed Dumpling; tho somehow no one appeared to care very much what he thought about it.

"And from this time on," Perk affirmed, "we're going to keep on the lookout for a promising opening that starts off with a show of plenty of water, and perhaps a current. That's another thing came to me; if this swamp drains into the Garraway on this side, why, seems like there might be something of a movement to the water, especially where it's deep. I mean to keep dropping bits of paper or little shavings of wood on the water, and watching to see what they do."

"Perk, you've waked up, that's what; and now we're a-goin' to get there!" Red announced joyously; indeed, every member of the party seemed to feel the uplift of new hopes, for the anxious expressions died away from their faces.

"Let's get busy right away!" called out Dumpling, after a swift look around to make sure that none of the lunch was in danger of being wasted.

It would seem that all of them were just as eager to make a start, to judge by the rapidity with which the things they had carried ashore were taken back on board, and stowed away. Then the cables were untied, and presently the cheery "pop-pop-pop" of exhausts announced that the "Get There Motor Boat Club" of Boonton was once more on the move.

Filled with a new enthusiasm, and a belief that Perk might have hit on the secret of getting out of the intricate channels of the swamp, the four chums continued to keep their eyes on the alert; for Perk had asked this as a special favor; and requested that the one who should first discover a promising opening would call out, so that they might head that way.

Still another weary hour passed without any glorious result coming to reward them. Many times they had imagined the long looked-for opening was near by, but on pushing that way it was found to be a false hope; for the supposed deep water had no current whatever.

Late in the afternoon, for the tenth time, Perk carelessly dropped several bits of paper over while they were holding on to the bushes so as to keep the boats steady. A few seconds later and there arose a shout from several pairs of boyish lips—an outcry that was not of alarm this time, but rather along the line of bubbling joy and delight.

CHAPTER XI.

"DID you see that, boys?" demanded Perk, excitedly; and as a rule it had to be something more than ordinary to arouse him, so well did he know how to control himeslf.

"It floated off, just as fine as you please!" cried Bob.

"Hurrah, Moses is a-goin' to get out of the bulrushes at last!" declared Dumpling.

"Perk, you've struck oil, and there's something of a current here, sure as you live!" remarked Red, with the "smile that won't come off" expanding all over his freckled face.

"It looks encouraging, anyhow," said Perk.

"Let's follow the paper pilot!" suggested Dumpling.

"We might as well float along for a while," the Commodore announced; 'tho I hardly think we'll get anywhere to-day, because the afternoon is pretty well spent, and you'll have to excuse me from trying to creep along thru this place after it gets dark."

"Yes, let well enough alone; that's the safest policy," Bob answered, with the air of one who had learned a few things in his short life, and meant to profit by his experiences.

Accordingly they allowed both boats to float gently on the slow current; but at least it meant considerable to them just to know that they were moving at all. While they "meandered," as Red called it, at this snail-like pace, they exchanged many remarks. The whole situation was again canvassed, and Perk had to ransack the utmost corners of his brain in order to answer the queer questions with which his "want-to-know-it-all" chums bombarded him.

"Getting some dark, ain't it?" fellers?" Dumpling finally remarked, with a vein of nervousness in his voice; for the idea of being on the move at night time, amidst those weird surroundings, did not appeal to him at all.

"Yes, and I think I see where we want to tie up," added Perk, who, it seemed, had been keeping his eyes about him all this while.

It did not take them long to secure the boats; for, as on other occasions, they did not have to bother their heads considering what might happen in the night; as a storm could not blow them away; there seemed not the remotest chance of any one attempting a theft; and this exhausted the list of dangers such as might threaten cruisers on the rivers or bay.

The swamp seemed as dense and forbidding as ever, and yet somehow Perk said he had "a feeling in his bones" that they could not be more than a mile at the most away from its southern border; tho they might have to head in all sorts of directions first in order to find the outlet.

"But sure the old canal couldn't have run in such a crooked way as that, Perk?" Bob remarked, as tho puzzled.

"No more it did," the other told him. "But it's fallen in, and we lost all track of the same long ago. This passage with the little set in the current, is just one of the ones Nature made, when the rain filled the swamp with surplus water, and it had to find a way to reach the Garraway. There, did you hear that, boys?"

"It was a plain, everyday whistle, Perk!" cried Dumpling.

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In a very interesting article on Locomotor Ataxia, Dr. Henry C. Story says that drugs have practically no beneficial effect in these cases. He says that rest should be insisted upon, and there should be no worries or troubles. Plenty of fresh air and moderate exercise must be insisted upon, but over-exertion is injurious. The use of tobacco and alcohol should be strictly forbidden, and over-eating is dangerous, especially when the food is poorly masticated. The food must be of the most nourishing kind, and the quantity and variety must be changed so that the patient will not lose his appetite. The most annoying symptom in these cases is the pain which at times is almost unbearable. Dr. Story says that he finds two Anti-kamnia Tablets repeated in an hour if necessary, gives prompt relief and rest to the patient. These Tablets can be obtained at all druggists in any quantity desired. Ask for A-K Tablets.

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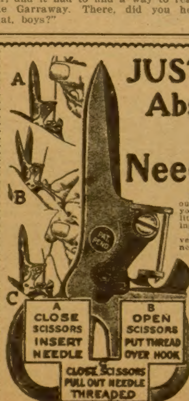
Price 15 cents. W. C. WATKINS, Parnassus, Pa.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B
C
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B OPEN SCISSORS PUT THREAD OVER HOOK
CLOSE SCISSORS PULL OUT NEEDLE THREADED

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Absolutely New!
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Needle Threader

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It is the only practical needle threader invented. It's simple as A-B-C. You simply drop needle in brass tube (a), open scissors, which automatically pushes a small hook through the eye; then lay thread over the hook as shown in (b), close the scissors, which draws hook holding thread through the eye. Pull the threaded needle from the tube as shown in (c)—so simple a child can operate it. The scissors are not meant to take the place of a pair of shears, but they are of a fine quality of steel; the blades are case-hardened and ground and the combination is an excellent one for a lady's work basket. We have arranged with the inventor of the combination scissors-needle threader to give them to our readers.

FREE Simply send us $1.00 for a year's subscription, new or renewal, to either the BLADE or the LEDGER, or $1.00 for both for six months and we will send the combination, postage paid. Canada price $1.50 for each paper.

W. D. BOYCE CO., 500 North Dearborn St., Chicago

THE FAIRY CORNER

BIRDIE'S NEW YEAR.

Birdie Agnew had heard her mother, father, brother Ned and sister Helen talking a great deal about the coming of New Year, and being only 7 years old, she had been obliged to ask a number of questions regarding the holiday which seemed to promise a great deal. Sister Helen, 17, was planning a watch party, and Birdie had at first supposed it to mean a party where every one carried a watch, silver or gold; but Helen had explained that her party of young friends would come to stay thru the entire first half of the night, and precisely at twelve sit down to a supper which their mother was assisting to plan.

And brother Ned, 14, was going to a skating carnival, dressed as a clown, and he was spending most of his time just now at the costumer's, superintending his masquerade dress. He was almost too much occupied to answer Birdie's questions when she asked him about New Year, and why so many people did things on that especial day.

But he told her this much: "You see, Kiddo," he said, "that a little chap by the name of New Year comes trotting to the earth, from the clouds, and takes up the reins of government. And either he makes people good, or allows them to make themselves bad. Now, he'll come to town just on the stroke of twelve, and——"

But Mrs. Agnew had overheard a part of the fantastic yarn Ned was weaving for his baby sister's edification, and checked him. "Ned," she interrupted, "either tell Birdie the truth concerning New Year, or tell her nothing at all. I don't like your improvising fairy tales for her."

Then Ned had made his escape, and Birdie turned to ask her mother all about it when Helen called from upstairs, "Oh, mother, please come here a minute! I want your suggestion about the decoration of my room for New Year's Eve."

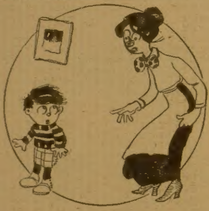
Mrs. Agnew went upstairs to give assistance to her daughter, and Birdie was left to herself. She got her dolls and played the remainder of the afternoon till supper time. The subject of New Year was not resumed that evening, as company was at the table, and the conversation turned upon most everything save the near holiday. Even little Birdie did not think of New Year again that day.

So the time passed along, and New Year's Eve dawned. The Agnew family were very busy, for Helen's party was to be quite a function, fifty guests being invited to watch the Old Year out and the New Year in. So little Birdie was much to herself all day, playing with her dolls. Late in the evening, after her father came home, she asked:

"Papa, why do people make a holiday of New Year? Is it a day like Christmas or Sunday?"

Papa told Birdie that New Year's Day was only the first day of another year, that the world had a birthday, so to speak Then the subject dropped, and nothing more was said about New Year, for the supper bell rang and every one went to the dining-room. Ned was full of the carnival, and would eat hardly a bite of supper, even tho his mother urged him to do so. And Helen was greatly excited, and had no appetite. In fact, everything was in a state of excitement that evening, and Birdie was not noticed particularly.

Soon after supper—at precisely half-past seven, Mrs. Agnew told Birdie it was time for her to get ready for bed. "You know a lot of company is coming tonight, and you must get to sleep before the guests arrive. You are too little and too young to stay up to parties, but after a while, when you are a big girl like sister, you, too, shall have watch parties. So little chick, come with muvver." And Mrs. Agnew led her youngest child upstairs.



Willie—"May I go and play now, ma?"

Mother—"What? With those holes in your trousers?"

Willie—"No; with the boy next door."

After being put to bed Birdie lay awake for a very long time, wondering. Suppose Ned was right about New Year being a little boy and coming from the clouds! Her mother called Ned's tale a fairy story, but mamma did not believe in fairy stories. Birdie did. She had a great big story book which dealt entirely with good fairies helping little children in need. Yes, Birdie believed implicitly in fairies.

Soon the guests began arriving, and Birdie could hear them laughing and talking, could hear the almost continuous ringing of the front doorbell and the opening and closing of the door by a hired butler who was her grandmother's chauffeur on ordinary occasions.

Then the ringing of the bell ceased and Birdie knew that all Helen's company had assembled and were in the two beautiful parlors. Their voices and laughter came up the stairs more faintly now, and Birdie lay very quiet, listening to catch what she could of the merriment downstairs.

After what seemed a very long time Birdie heard the doorbell give a quick little ring. Then she listened for some one to open the door. But no one did so, and again came the quick little ding-dong of the bell. Birdie listened impatiently. Why did not the butler open the door and admit the guest?

A third and more vigorous ring took Birdie out of bed. She ran to the head of the stairs and peeped down. No one was in the hall, and the lights had been turned low. Slowly and cautiously Birdie went downstairs, keeping an eye on the two parlor doors, fearing lest some guest might open one and step out into the hall. But no such calamity happened, and she reached the hall door without being discovered by a living soul.

At the door she listened. She could hear some one stamping his feet on the doormat, and at once decided it was Ned come home for something. She boldly opened the door, and lo! there, on the mat, stood a tiny elfinlike boy with little wings sprouting at his shoulders. About him flocked a small army of little creatures not half so large as himself. They, too, had bits of wings at their backs. All were most gorgeously and fantastically dressed.

Birdie had not long to wait for an introduction from the visitor, for he doffed a dear little cap and bowed low. Then he said in the most beautiful voice Birdie had ever heard: "I am Master New Year, miss, and with your permission I shall come in and pay my respects to you while waiting for twelve o'clock to arrive. You see, I am a bit ahead of time."

"Oh, surely, come in," said Birdie, greatly elated to have New Year calling upon her. And it certainly was a comfort to know that New Year was not a day, but a beautiful winged boy. "Come right in and follow me, please. You cannot go into the parlors for my sister Helen is having a watch party tonight."

"Yes, she and her guests are watching for me, you know. And I am a bit ahead of schedule time. It wants half an hour to twelve, so I said to my followers, 'We'll pay Miss Birdie Agnew a visit while the time is ours.' So here we are. Come on, my followers."

As New Year spoke, he beckoned to the crowd of tiny creatures about him, and together they all flocked into the hall and followed the happy Birdie upstairs to her room. They quite filled the room, and Birdie had to allow some of them to sit on the floor while others sat upon chairs, couch, pictures and window casings. They could fly to any spot where there might be a place to sit. So the room presented a very queer appearance.

Birdie sat upon the side of her bed, happy as any little girl could be under the most unusual circumstances. New Year, who had seated himself in an arm chair, smiled at her and began to speak.

"Now, Miss Birdie, I shall tell you who my companions are. They are a band of Good Resolutions, and have come to remain with me during my sojourn of a year on earth. They battle against a very wicked army of Bad Temptations, that also come on New Year's Day. I know you will want the advice of one of my band, for he can tell you which path to follow for a year."

But just as he had finished speaking a most peculiar noise was heard in the house. Bells were ringing, loud laughing mingled with singing. Birdie's door opened rudely, and Birdie felt something cold touch her.

"Come, Kiddo, wake up and hear the Old Year going out and the New Year coming in."

Birdie felt herself slipping over a steep hill, then she suddenly opened her eyes to see standing over her big brother Ned, all in his clown's suit. He was grinning from ear to ear. "Hear the bells all over the city, Kiddo?" he asked, shaking Birdie, and making her sit up. "Listen! Now it's New Year.

"And you've been fast asleep while the little chap stole into the city. Come—hear Helen's company downstairs? They're singing a New Year anthem. Sounds great, eh? I came home in time for supper. The carnival was great, too, believe me. Say, Kiddo, I'll slip some of the nut cake and ice cream up to you if you want it."

Cake and ice cream! They were the magic words which woke Birdie to a full realization that she had been fast asleep and dreaming. And no band of Good Resolutions, led by New Year, had been in her room! She had dreamed the whole fairy tale.

With a smile as warm as her own little heart, Birdie turned to her big brother Ned. "Yes, brother, I'd like some nut cake and ice cream, if you please. It's not wrong to eat at the very beginning of New Year, is it?"

"Well, I should say not, Kiddo," roared Ned. And as he rushed from the room in his clown's suit Birdie was glad it was he—her sure-enough big brother—instead of the winged New Year of whom she had dreamed.

Real people and ice cream and cake were better, after all, than fairy creatures who belonged rightly in books.

* * *

A PIONEER.

Susie, aged 4, called, one morning, on the neighbor lady across the way.

"Mamma's gone, and Hannah's the boss now," she said.

No comment being made, she went on:

"Say, Hannah can spank harder'n mamma can, too."

"Oh," sympathized the lady, "I didn't know that."

"No," answered Susie complacently and with pity for the neighbor's ignorance, "I was the first one to find it out."

Don't Merely "Stop" a Cough

Stop the Thing that Causes It and the Cough will Stop Itself.

A cough is really one of our best friends. It warns us that there is inflammation or obstruction in a dangerous place. Therefore, when you get a bad cough don't proceed to dose yourself with a lot of drugs that merely "stop" the cough temporarily by deadening the throat nerves. Treat the cause—heal the inflamed membranes. Here is a home-made remedy that gets right at the cause and will make an obstinate cough vanish more quickly than you ever thought possible.

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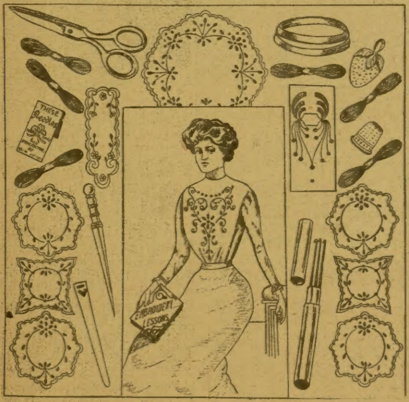

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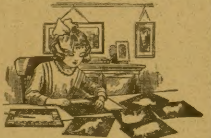

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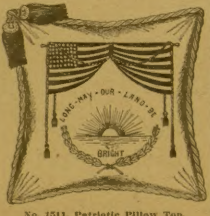
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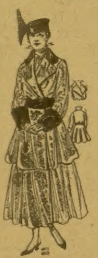

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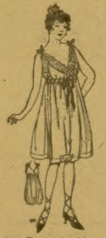

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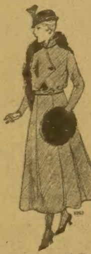

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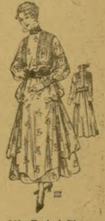

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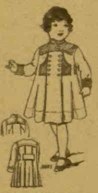

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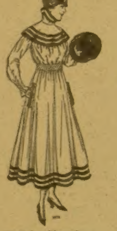

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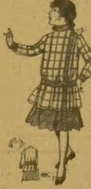

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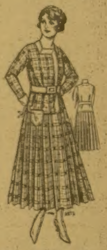

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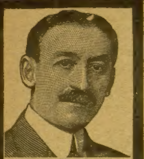

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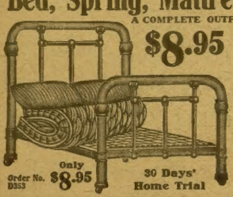

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30 Days' Home Trial

Send only 50c With Order

This attractive full size Complete Metal Bed Outfit consists of a handsome, perfectly constructed Iron Bed, which may be had in blue, green, or plain white enamel. Size 4 feet 6 inches wide; a very durable, rust-proof steel link fabric spring with heavy angle steel frame; a well made 50 pound cotton top mattress; and a pair of select, well covered feather pillows. We will ship the complete outfit on 30 days' trial. You may return it at our expense if you find it unsatisfactory and your money will be refunded. **Price only $8.95 on complete outfit. Special introductory terms, 50c with order. Balance payable 50c monthly.**

A Remarkably Beautiful Tapestry Brussels

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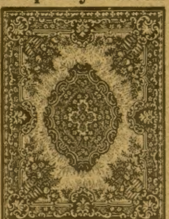
Room Rug $11.45

Size 9 x 12 feet



It is difficult to describe in such a small space the merits of this new Tapestry Brussels Rug. It is full 9 x 12 feet in size. The face is made of serviceable wool carpet yarn, closely woven and in an unusually striking pattern. The urns in the corners are of old gold, holding rich dark red roses. The neat medallion center is a wreath of shaded roses and green leaves and the intervening field is a striking French gray shade overlaid with autumn colors. The rich greens and old gold in the outer border help to make the rug most attractive. Our price of $11.45 is exceptionally low and we will ship the rug to you on 30 days' home trial. If it does not please you, send it back at our expense and we will refund your first payment and any money that you have paid for freight.

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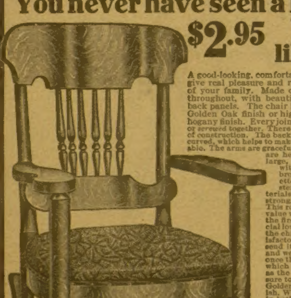

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Price $2.95

A good-looking, comfortable rocker that will give real pleasure and rest to every member of your family. Made of genuine solid oak throughout, with beautifully quarter-sawed back panels. The chair is supplied in either Golden Oak finish or highly glossed rich Mahogany finish. Every joint is carefully *mortised* or *screwed* together. There is no stronger method of construction. The back is high, wide and well curved, which helps to make the chair so comfortable. The arms are gracefully curved and the legs are heavy and strong. The large, roomy seat is covered with exceptionally good brown Spanish Leatherette and carefully upholstered over durable materials and supported by strong, spiral, steel springs. This rocker is a regular $5.50 value which we here offer for the first time at the very special low price of only $2.95. If the chair is not entirely satisfactory when it reaches you, send it back at our expense and we will refund to you at once the first payment of 50c which you have made, as well as the freight you paid. Be sure to state if you want the Golden Oak or Mahogany finish. We guarantee the rocker in both finishes and in every detail. Study the picture carefully. It is an absolutely correct likeness of the chair in every detail.

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